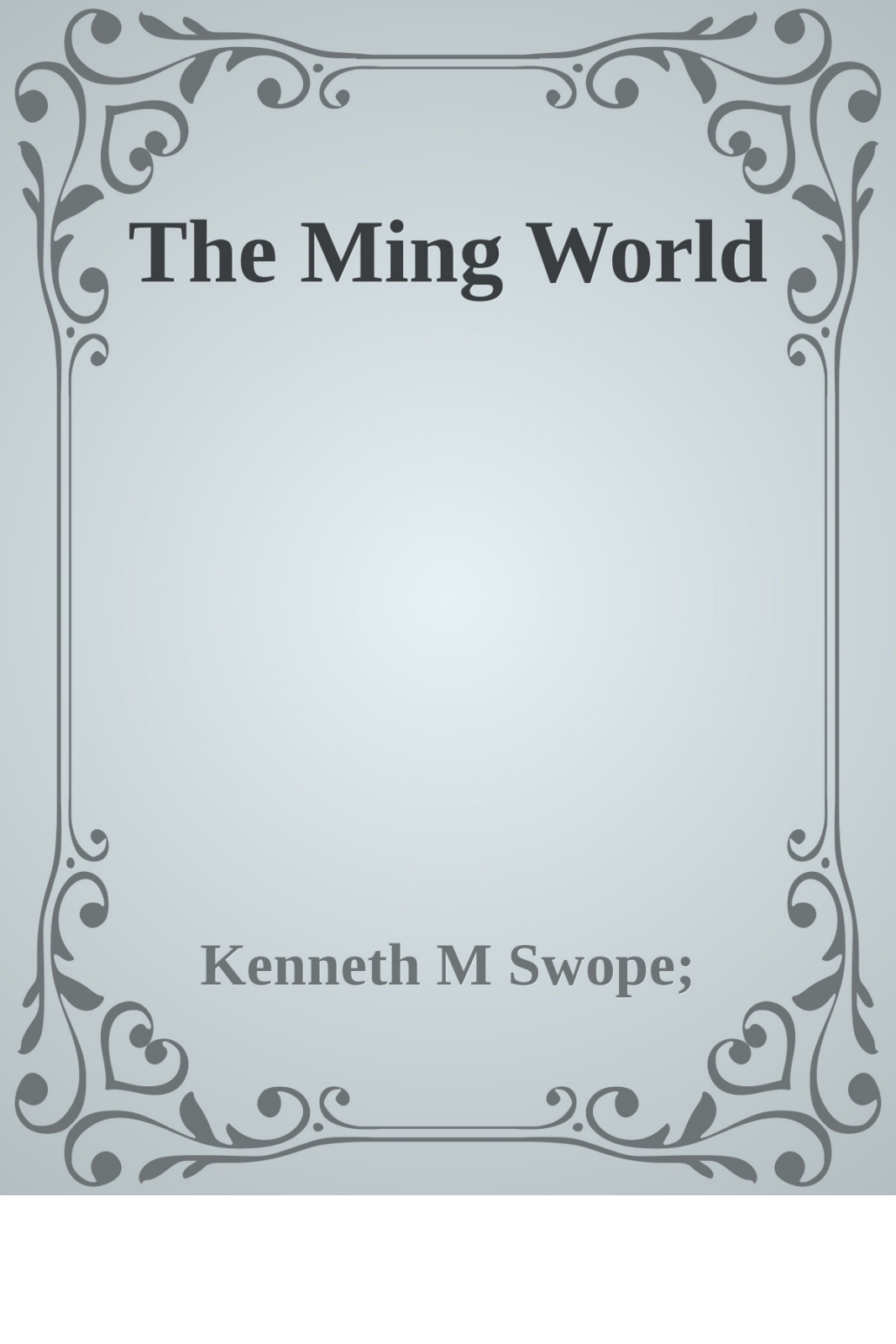


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The Ming World

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THE MING WORLD

Edited by KENNETH M. SWOPE

THE MING WORLD

The Ming World draws together scholars from all over the world to bring China's Ming Dynasty (1368–1662) to life, exploring recent scholarly trends and academic debates that highlight the dynamism of the Ming and its key place in the early modern world.

The book is designed to replicate the structure of popular Ming-era unofficial histories that gathered information and gossip from a wide variety of fields and disciplines. Engaging with a broad array of primary and secondary sources, the authors build upon earlier scholarship while extending the field to embrace new theories, methodologies, and interpretive frameworks. It is divided into five thematically linked sections: Institutions, Ideas, Identities, Individuals, and Interactions.

Unique in its breadth and scope, *The Ming World* is essential reading for scholars and postgraduates of early modern China, the history of East Asia and anyone interested in gaining a broader picture of the colorful Ming world and its inhabitants.

Kenneth M. Swope is Professor of History and Senior Fellow of the Dale Center for the Study of War & Society at the University of Southern Mississippi. He is also a board member of the Chinese Military History Society and the book review editor for *The Journal of Chinese Military History*. His publications include *A Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail: Ming China and the First Great East Asian War, 1592–1598*; *The Military Collapse of China's Ming Dynasty, 1618–1644*; *On the Trail of the Yellow Tiger: War, Trauma and Social Dislocation in Southwest China During the Ming-Qing Transition*.

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THE MING WORLD



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MING DYNASTY REIGN TITLES AND DATES



Temple name	Reign title	Dates
Taizu	Hongwu	1368-1398
Huizong	Jianwen	1399-1402
Chengzu	Yongle	1403-1424
Renzong	Hongxi	1425
Xuanzong	Xuande	1426-1435
Yingzong	Zhengtong	1436-1449
Daizong	Jingtai	1450-1456
Yingzong	Tianshun	1457-1464
Xianzong	Chenghua	1465-1487
Xiaozong	Hongzhi	1488-1505
Wuzong	Zhengde	1506-1521
Shizong	Jiajing	1522-1566
Muzong	Longqing	1567-1572
Shenzong	Wanli	1573-1620
Guangzong	Taichang	1620
Xizong	Tianqi	1621-1627
Sizong	Chongzhen	1628-1644
Anzong	Hongguang	1645
Shaozong	Longwu	1646
	Yongli	1647-1661

MING WEIGHTS AND MEASURES



Chinese unit	U.S. equivalent	Metric equivalent
1 <i>fen</i>	0.141 inches	0.358 centimeters
1 <i>cun</i>	1.41 inches	3.581 centimeters
1 <i>chi</i> (linear)	14.1 inches	35.814 centimeters
1 <i>chi</i> (itinerary)	12.1 inches	30.734 centimeters
1 <i>zhang</i>	141 inches	3.581 meters
1 <i>bu</i>	60.5 inches	1.536 meters
1 <i>li</i>	1821.15 feet	0.555 kilometers
1 <i>mu</i>	0.16 acres	0.064 hectares
1 <i>qing</i>	16.16 acres	6.539 hectares
1 <i>liang</i> (tael)	1.327 ounces	37.62 grams
1 <i>qian</i> (cash)	0.1327 ounces	3.762 grams
1 <i>jin</i> (catty)	1.33 pounds	603.277 grams
1 <i>dan</i> (picul)	133.33 pounds	60.477 kilograms
1 <i>shi</i> (stone)	160 pounds	72.574 kilograms
1 <i>sheng</i>	1.87 pints	1.031 liters
1 <i>dou</i>	2.34 gallons	10.31 liters

INTRODUCTION



The essays in this volume represent the florescence of the field of Ming studies over the past three decades since the seminal publication of the first Ming volume of *The Cambridge History of China*, which presented what is still the most comprehensive one-volume narrative history of the Ming dynasty in English.¹ Indeed, these contributions should be viewed as supplements and expansions of the work introduced there and in its companion volume a decade later, which added a collection of topical chapters on Ming government, institutions, thought, and the like.² In fact the authors in the present work were encouraged to submit essays on a range of topics that would build upon these earlier efforts and which might not have much coverage elsewhere with the organizing principle being to invoke the spirit of Ming miscellanies (*zaji*) or unofficial histories (*yeshi*). Indeed, many of the authors cite such primary sources in their contributions herein. Additionally, inspired by the Ming court culture conference in London that I had the good fortune to participate in during the autumn of 2014, this volume contains a wealth of interdisciplinary work from art historians, specialists in Ming literature and drama, and archaeological and cartographic insights in addition to contributions from more traditionally focused historians.³

The scholars contributing to this book also represent multiple generations and methodologies, again reflecting the evolution of the field and demonstrating the breadth and diversity of not only the Ming dynasty, but also those studying it. Contributors were given free rein in

selecting their subjects, the aim being to provide snippets of the Ming world that would both offer insight into broad social, intellectual, and institutional frameworks while encouraging further exploration. Therefore more general essays are included alongside specialized studies. It is presumed that readers will have basic familiarity with the political history of the Ming. Those who do not are encouraged to consult the various surveys referenced in the bibliography.

The emphasis upon crossing disciplinary boundaries reflects the evolution of the field as a whole, not to mention the more ready access to sources and sites in China than was the case in the 1980s. It is our belief that the end result captures the vibrancy and dynamism of the Ming world and underscores its centrality in the early modern world as a whole. For the Ming state was undoubtedly the largest and most influential empire of its era and it is surprisingly only in the past few decades that this fact has been rediscovered, despite its acknowledgment by the Ming's contemporaries.

Indeed, it is worth noting that this newfound appreciation of the Ming is in fact the culmination of a resurgence of interest in the Ming that began in the 1960–70s as scholars such as Charles Hucker, Edward Farmer (who has an essay in the present volume) and Edward Dreyer laid the groundwork by studying Ming institutional and political history.⁴ Other scholars, such as James Parsons, followed the lead of their counterparts in China in studying the origins and impact of social movements such as the great peasant rebellions of the late Ming or the so-called “Japanese pirate” (*wokou*) crisis of the mid-sixteenth century, both of which get treatment herein.⁵ Still other scholars studied the vibrant intellectual world of the Ming, often through biographical studies.⁶ Thus one sees a transition from studying the institutional and political foundations to focusing on individuals and groups within the Ming. Though many of these scholars lacked ready access to primary sources in mainland China owing to the political climate at the time, they nonetheless helped lay the groundwork for future generations and sparked new directions in research for students not only of the Ming, but for imperial China as a whole.

With respect to the late Ming period in particular, arguably the most influential work on the Ming to emerge during this era was Ray Huang's *1587: A Year of No Significance: The Ming Dynasty in Decline*.⁷ Engagingly written as a series of vignettes of important political figures of the late Ming, including the controversial Emperor Wanli (r. 1573–1620), the book examines events from a seemingly unimportant year to examine (and indict) the late Ming political, social, and institutional orders, and by extension pretty much all of imperial China. Huang had

served as a low ranking military officer in Chiang Kai-shek's notoriously corrupt and inefficient military during World War II and in this and other books, he extrapolated back from that experience to find fault in nearly everything about traditional Chinese institutions, which were consistently portrayed as hidebound, corrupt, ossified, and wedded to overly formalized rituals that were blindly followed in the face of reason. In many cases in 1587 and elsewhere in Huang's writings, China was explicitly and unfavorably compared to the supposedly more dynamic and innovative West.⁸ In the case of the Ming, Huang referred to it as "an introverted and noncompetitive state."⁹

Unfortunately, this general perspective on the Ming in general and Emperor Wanli in particular has continued to exert a tenacious hold on the popular mindset and in general survey texts and world history treatments of the Ming. Huang's book was (and still is to an extent) tremendously popular. It was frequently used in college level classrooms and has even recently been adopted for use with a historical role playing game called "Reacting to the Past" for use in college classes.¹⁰ It was translated into Chinese as *Wanli shiwu nian* [The 15th Year of the Wanli Reign] and is still in print and widely available in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and mainland China. On multiple occasions Chinese friends of mine who are not academics have told me how much they enjoyed this book and how it shapes their perception of this particular emperor and the late Ming.¹¹

Moreover, in the academic realm Huang's negative take on Wanli, while sympathetic to an extent, continues to exert a powerful influence as Huang authored the chapter of the Longqing and Wanli reigns for the aforementioned *Cambridge History*.¹² Thus, his negative appraisal of Wanli and the late Ming has remained the dominant interpretation in English language scholarship. At one point Huang refers to Wanli as "the most venal and avaricious occupant of the imperial throne in Chinese history." Following Huang's interpretation uncritically, Frederick Mote, in his own survey of late imperial Chinese history, notes that "It is almost superfluous to write at any length about the Wanli reign because it has been so effectively portrayed and analyzed in the writings of Ray Huang." Following Huang, Mote goes on to say that Wanli "grew into a most perverse ruler, addicted to alcohol and sex, infinitely avaricious, and petulantly defiant toward his courtiers."¹³ Other scholars have similarly embraced this traditional view of Wanli, which to be fair, derives from his portrayal in the *Ming shi*, which was compiled under the auspices of the Manchu Qing.¹⁴ The same remains true to an extent in China where we find Cao Guoqing calling Wanli "a muddle headed emperor at the head of a rotten state."¹⁵

Such characterizations have continued in popular world history textbooks, as well as in some survey texts about Chinese history. *Voyages in World History*, authored by China specialist Valerie Hansen and Kenneth Curtis, laconically asserts, “The decline of the Ming is associated with the Wanli Emperor (r. 1573–1620). His apathetic attitude toward his duties allowed personalities and petty jealousies to influence the imperial court, and without imperial oversight, corruption increased.”¹⁶ The sidebar definition of Wanli adds, “Vain and extravagant, he hastened the decline of the Ming dynasty through lack of attention to policy and the promotion of incompetent officials.”¹⁷ Of course such charges could be leveled at any number of Ming emperors, or indeed, rulers from any Chinese dynasty. Certainly factional strife was an omnipresent feature of the political landscape in imperial China. Later in the chapter the authors reference the Japanese invasion of Korea, which took place during the 1590s, but say nothing of Wanli’s crucial role in helping defeat the invasion and in preserving Ming primacy in Asia for another half century.¹⁸ Their list of further references concerning the Ming contains none of the latest English scholarship on the Ming, but instead confines itself to a dated biography of the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci.¹⁹

In fact the thrust of the chapter offers a rather dated presentation of the old impact-response model whereby a dynamic West began asserting itself on the global stage as the rest of the world, most notably China, sank into rigid and self-absorbed hierarchical orders.²⁰ Other popular textbooks offer similar appraisals of the Ming. The subsection on the Ming in *World Civilizations: The Global Experience* is entitled “Ming China: A Global Mission Refused,” evincing a thorough misunderstanding of the origin and rationale for the famous Zheng He naval missions.²¹ The only survey text covering the entirety of Asian history similarly dismisses Wanli and his successors as indolent and pleasure loving while contrasting them with the supposedly more vigorous Manchus.²²

According to Hansen, after its early period of expansion and international engagement, the Ming became more conservative in its outlook, especially with regard to foreign powers and ideas. This conservatism supposedly came to affect China as a whole and was key in China’s eclipse by Europe in following centuries. While none of these portrayals is entirely incorrect, they are based on seriously dated scholarship and fail to capture the dynamism of the Ming and the inherent flexibility of its political, military, fiscal, and social institutions, all of which will be considered in the present volume. The East Asian tributary system, the dynamism of which is amply revealed in several chapters in the present volume, is singled out for its baleful influence on

the Ming and East Asia as well. This interpretation is in line with Hansen's own textbook on Chinese history, *The Open Empire*, wherein she maintains that the late Ming was essentially the beginning of the end for China as a dynamic and cosmopolitan empire.²³

Fortunately, new scholarship in both China and the West is reevaluating Wanli and his reign and offering a much more nuanced and balanced interpretation of the ruler himself and the events that transpired during his rule, which was the longest of the entire Ming dynasty.²⁴ The reality of continuing Ming military power and the rationale behind the later Ming emperors' extensive use of eunuch officials for a variety of tasks has become evident. Creative use of new source materials, many produced by those at odds with the dominant literary and political figures (themselves usually from the literati class) show how state and society were in constant tension while at the same time responsive in meeting new changes and challenges, many of them engendered from outside China. Significantly more attention is being devoted to the Ming period as a whole and examining how certain institutions evolved in line with these broader developments. Notable works in this regard include David Robinson's work on the continuity between Mongol and Ming military spectacles and practices, Sarah Schneewind's work on community schools in the Ming, Timothy Brook's work on Ming commercial life, and Michael Szonyi's recent study of the evolving place of the hereditary Ming military system in local society.²⁵

Nonetheless, because of the drama of its rise and fall, the beginning and end of the Ming dynasty have traditionally received the most attention from scholars. The middle period is still often cast as an era of stability during which time the dynasty became set in its ways and unable to cope with the changing world, as will be explained below.²⁶ In the case of its fall, as noted above, the demise of the Ming and the rise of the Qing was traditionally attributed to the dynamism of the latter and the supposed ossification of the former after the dynamic rule of the first several Ming emperors.²⁷ The Qing conquerors themselves encouraged such an interpretation and they actively produced documentation to reflect this perspective.²⁸ So for several centuries the image of a dynamic Qing and a corrupt, bumbling Ming was perpetuated in China and used to explain, at least in a general way, the dynastic succession and continuance of the so-called dynastic cycle. More recently, however, the emergence of the field of late imperial China and the blurring of the strict delineations of the dynastic model has encouraged scholars to emphasize continuity as well as change and look at the dynamic evolution of political and social institutions in response to global, national, and local changes.²⁹

The resurgence of interest in the Ming and the newfound emphasis upon its dynamism is also interestingly connected to the rise of Qing studies in the West, most notably the emergence of the so-called “New Qing History” in the 1980s–90s that emphasized the unusual nature of the Manchu state that arose from the defeat of the Ming in the seventeenth century.³⁰ This recasting of history seriously called into question older notions about the supposed allure of Chinese culture and its ability to Sinicize and civilize its “barbarian” conquerors and highlighted the syncretism of Qing government and political and social institutions.³¹ It also underscored the imperialist nature of the Qing state and its penchant for military conquest that culminated in the vast territorial expanse that is the modern People’s Republic (for the most part), an assertion that has raised hackles in academic circles in China.³² Some scholars explicitly contrasted the Qing with the Ming, arguing for a more explicitly militarized Qing culture that derived from the Manchus’ origins as semi-nomadic steppe warriors.³³ The Ming, by contrast, was still generally characterized as the repository of literati culture and civilian domination of the military, both of which were often cited as reasons for its fall.

As is evident from the essays that follow, these old canards are increasingly being discarded as new avenues of research open up in the Ming. Both on their own initiatives and inspired by their Qing counterparts, historians of the Ming are making a strong case for re-centering the Ming, if you will. For the Ming marks in many ways the maturation of the traditional Chinese bureaucratic empire and political system. And while the Qing undoubtedly opened up new directions in governance that were informed by the Manchus’ steppe background, recent scholarship by David Robinson and others, including Ted Farmer herein, has convincingly demonstrated that the Ming was also a Eurasian empire with strong political and cultural ties to its neighbors, even if the avowed rhetoric, as asserted by Leo Shin, tended towards a form of Han Chinese chauvinism.³⁴ So the Qing was not quite as innovative or unique as its proponents might claim, nor was the Ming as insular and uninterested in global developments, technologies, and ideas, a point driven home by the fine recent work of Tonio Andrade on the evolution of gunpowder technology in China.³⁵

We will now turn to some of the major themes of this work, leaving more focused discussion of the connections between individual contributions to the introductions preceding the various sections of the book. The first is the relationship between institutional continuity and change. Because of the overwhelming personality and drive of the founding emperor Hongwu (r. 1368–98) as well as the fact that he personally produced more legislation than any monarch in Chinese

history in order to stabilize China after the defeat of the Mongol Yuan, the Ming was long cast as inherently conservative and inflexible, successive rulers apparently loathe to reverse the dictates of their august ancestor.³⁶ Part of this is due to the fact that in order to provide a sense of tradition and stability, institutional names and structures often remained static even if the realities were constantly in flux.

Yet even a cursory perusal of the *Ming shilu* (Veritable Records) or the dynastic history reveals a constant process of negotiation and tweaking as both Ming officials and their subjects realized the value of flexibility, while acknowledging the importance of tradition and continuity. This is particularly apparent in studying Ming military institutions, which retained the founder's hereditary system even as they evolved to incorporate significant mercenary elements and pioneered the innovative use of gunpowder weapons.³⁷ The Ming initially served as the primary disseminators of military gunpowder technology throughout East Asia. And, as soon as they realized the superiority of Western designs in the early sixteenth century, they adopted these and used them to great effect in both domestic and foreign conflicts.³⁸ The adaptation of the Grand Secretariat (*neige*) and the emergence of the role of a chief grand secretary to replace the prime minister (whose position was eliminated by the Ming founder in a purge) would constitute another example of the pragmatic flexibility of the Ming system. The use of eunuchs to fill a wide variety of extra-bureaucratic, surveillance, diplomatic, and military positions, while much decried by civil and military officials during the Ming and after, was also a rational response to personal and administrative needs and offered Ming rulers a range of choices and freedom of action in matters that was otherwise not available. These adjustments speak to the ingenuity of Ming autocracy for better or worse.

Another recurrent theme in the present work is the centrality of the Ming both in a regional and a global sense. As the largest empire of its day, the Ming economy was truly an engine spurring global trade. Some scholars have gone so far as to credit the Ming with launching global trade by virtue of lifting its so-called maritime bans in 1567 in conjunction with the "Single Whip Reforms" that aimed at monetizing tax collection and tapping into the global silver trade.³⁹ Ming porcelains circulated around the world. Archaeological discoveries have revealed a fascinating market for Ming "knock-offs" produced in Southeast Asia during times when the Ming government sought to curtail legal foreign trade. Ming philosophical debates were followed in Korea and Vietnam and Ming fashions circulated throughout East Asia. As Sixiang Wang notes below, Korean envoys to the Ming eagerly sought out Ming novels, short stories, and other representations of popular culture. The

military influence of the Ming was also felt throughout Asia, both directly, as in the case of the massive Zheng He expeditions, which have recently been reinterpreted as examples of power projection and proto-imperialism, and indirectly in the form of the tributary system more generally, which has been recast as an international medium for stability and regional security.⁴⁰ All of these studies are solidly grounded in primary sources and emphatically refute hoary notions of the Ming as xenophobic, introverted, or non-competitive. Rather one gets a sense of how security and strategic concerns interacted with the personalities of individual monarchs and their advisers to give rise to a range of policy choices.

One should also mention the importance of imperial agency in the Ming. After all, this was a notoriously despotic and autocratic political system by design. Ming emperors, perhaps influenced by their Mongol predecessors and certainly in imitation of their august founder, possessed a potential for unfettered action that was the product of centuries of political evolution in China. Though theoretically constrained by Confucian ideology and often hamstrung by political factionalism, Ming emperors were much more wont than their predecessors to exercise their rights in overbearing ways, such as flogging high officials in open court, a practice one never finds in the Song dynasty (960–1279), the last native ruling house before the Ming. Thus, while certainly we should not study history solely from the top and, as seen herein, many of the present studies explicitly look at actors from the lower rungs of society, it is also important to consider the shadow cast by the Ming emperors and their families. Their predilections and policies set the tone for their empire and personal decisions could affect tens of millions in realms as disparate as the military and the porcelain trade. And of course much of the material culture we have from the Ming is a reflection of the tastes of the imperial family and court elites.

Nonetheless, yet another fascinating trend of the Ming concerns the mingling of high and low culture. To an extent previously unrealized in Chinese history and perhaps to an even greater degree than in the succeeding Qing, one finds the elites partaking in more vulgar forms of culture and vice versa.⁴¹ Rising literacy rates meant that more people were reading fiction and literary forms such as ghost stories, comedies, and even pornography flourished.⁴² Philosophers such as Wang Yangming and his follower, Wang Gen, as discussed by Larry Israel below, lectured to the masses, championing the values of education for all and the innate potential for improvement present in all men. People of all classes and both genders went to temples and attended festivals and dramatic performances, the latter of which often featured stories from China's past. Popular novels also portrayed historical figures and

such representations were so well known that even peasant rebels, such as Li Dingguo, were supposedly inspired by these tales and sought to emulate the heroes described therein.

Along these lines, even against the backdrop of syncretism and baroque excess that one finds, particularly in the late Ming, there was also a strong awareness of the connections to Chinese culture and its traditions as a whole. While retaining much from the Mongol military system for example, the Ming founder sought to couch these institutions in more traditional guise, hearkening back to the Tang *fubing* system. Literati defined friendship in ways first articulated in the ancient Confucian classics. Music was represented as a means for edification and self-cultivation. The tributary system, first articulated in the Han, was restored and reached its apex as a medium for diplomatic, commercial, and military exchanges. From the perspective of the court and its agents, these measures offered a sense of stability and a tangible affirmation of the enduring power of Chinese civilization. For ordinary people they may have represented connections to the ancestors or inherited privileges and helped to anchor them in local society. Moreover, it can be said that these connections and the pride taken in them are themselves manifestations of the success of the imperial bureaucratic system itself. The Ming both inherited and innovated, albeit in different ways than the Qing after it. Indeed, the fact that the Qing retained so many Ming institutions reflects their realization of the utility of said institutions.

This book is divided into five parts, the organizational scheme reflecting the fact that there is an “i” in Ming. The categories are admittedly the product of the editor’s conceptualization of the project and there is obvious overlapping. But also these broad categories help to delineate certain fundamental dimensions of the Ming world. We begin with institutions. Institutions of all kinds underpinned the Ming state and all subjects of the Ming, not to mention its neighbors, and even those from afar, such as Jesuit priests, had to contend with the reality of these and other institutions. Next up are ideas, both those of specific categories and groups of people such as women and dramatists and those of society more broadly, such as religious beliefs. As noted above, the Ming society was highly syncretic, yet also the inheritor of millennia of tradition and engrained ideas. This section of the book explores how just a few of these ideas filtered through Ming society.

Part III treats identities, both those of groups and of the state itself, as seen through the medium of imperial architecture. Like so many other categories in the Ming dynasty, identity was fungible and much of the received wisdom about the supposed insularity and xenophobia of the Ming has been called into question in recent decades. Nonetheless, there

were efforts on the part of the state and certain (if not all) groups to delineate specific identities for themselves whether as the heirs to the Mandate of Heaven, the transmitters of dynastic legitimacy, the preservers of (Han) Chinese culture or something else. Everything had meaning in the Ming whether one is talking about the style and construction lines of a building or the proper way to venerate one's ancestors. And, as Xing Hang shows us, these identities could and did travel with Ming subjects to distant lands.

Part IV follows the cue of the *Ming shi* in highlighting the contributions of individuals to the rich tapestry of Ming history. Here we will encounter not only Wang Yangming, undoubtedly the most influential and important Ming philosopher whose influence transcended China, but also a woman warrior, musicians, empresses, members of the imperial clan and even a peasant rebel turned loyalist. The Ming world offered many opportunities for its subjects and the spread of literacy meant that we know far more of their stories than we do for their counterparts in earlier dynasties. This affords us the opportunity to get a much more complete picture of how individuals viewed themselves and their world and negotiated the daily challenges of life. While many benefitted from things like the expansion of global trade networks, others found themselves marginalized and victimized. Yet many of the same subjects who took up arms against the Ming state would eventually perish in its defense. Studying the varied lives of specific individuals reveals just how difficult generalizations about Ming society can be.

We finish, fittingly, with a section on interactions with the wider world. It is now commonplace to highlight the dynamic internationalism of the early Ming period while simultaneously decrying the Ming for “missing the chance” to dominate the globe and launch an Asian-oriented form of global imperialism. But such misconceptions are based on a profound misunderstanding of the logic of Chinese empire and the strategic imperatives of the Ming state. They also fail to take into account the complexity and flexibility of the Ming reconstruction of the old tributary order which, as amply demonstrated herein, offered much to all its participants and was a key part of the Ming world writ large. The essays in this part of the book also address the growing importance of international trade in everything from staples, to precious goods, to weapons. To some extent all roads and waterways led to and from the Ming. Let this be your invitation to read further and immerse yourself in the Ming world.

NOTES

- 1 See Fredrick Mote and Denis Twitchett, eds., *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 7: The Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644, Part One* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). More recent shorter surveys include Timothy Brook, *The Troubled Empire: China in the Yuan and Ming Dynasties* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); and John W. Dardess, *Ming China, 1368–1644: A Concise History of a Resilient Empire* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012).
- 2 Frederick Mote and Denis Twitchett, eds., *The Cambridge History of China, Volume 8: The Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644, Part Two* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- 3 See Craig Clunas, Jessica Harrison-Hall, and Yu-ping Luk, eds., *Ming China: Courts and Contacts, 1400–1450* (London: British Museum Press, 2016).
- 4 See Charles O. Hucker, *The Censorial System of Ming China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1966), idem., *The Ming Dynasty: Its Origins and Evolving Institutions* (Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Chinese Studies, 1978), idem., ed., *Chinese Government in Ming Times: Seven Studies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969); Edward Farmer, *Early Ming Government: The Evolution of Dual Capitals* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976); and Edward L. Dreyer, *Early Ming China: A Political History, 1355–1435* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1982).
- 5 James B. Parsons, *Peasant Rebellions of the Late Ming Dynasty* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1970). This book was reprinted by the Association for Asian Studies in 1993. On the *wokou*, see Kwan-wai So, *Japanese Piracy in Ming China During the Sixteenth Century* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1975).
- 6 Willard J. Peterson, *Bitter Gourd: Fang I-chih and the Impetus for Intellectual Change* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), and Peterson, “The Life of Ku Yen-wu (1612–1682),” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 28 (1968), 114–56 and 29 (1969), 210–47.
- 7 Ray Huang, *1587: A Year of No Significance: The Ming Dynasty in Decline* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981).
- 8 For example, see Ray Huang, *Broadening the Horizons of Chinese History* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1999), 3–100. Note the irony of the title of this book.
- 9 Ray Huang, *China: A Macro History* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), 169–85.
- 10 Daniel K. Gardner and Mark C. Carnes, *Confucianism and the Succession Crisis of the Wanli Emperor* 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2014).
- 11 Such perceptions are also derived from television shows, many of which have novelizations published in Chinese that are quite popular. For example, Hu Yuewei, Tao Bochu, and Qian Facheng, *Wanli wangchao* (Chengdu: Sichuan wenyi chubanshe, 2002).
- 12 See Ray Huang, “The Lung-ch’ing and Wanli Reigns,” in Mote and Twitchett, eds., *Cambridge History of China Volume 7*, 511–84.
- 13 F.W. Mote, *Imperial China, 900–1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 733–4.
- 14 An example is Jie Zhao, “A Decade of Considerable Significance: Late Ming Factionalism in the Making, 1583–1593,” *T’oung Pao* 88 (2002), 112–50.
- 15 Cao Guoqing, *Wanli huangdi dazhuan* (Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu chubanshe, 1994), 233.
- 16 Valerie Hansen and Kenneth Curtis, *Voyages in World History*, 2nd edition [Brief

- ed.] (Boston, MA: Cengage, 2016), 359.
- 17 Hansen and Curtis, *Voyages in World History*, 359.
- 18 On these efforts see Kenneth M. Swope, *A Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail: Ming China and the First Great East Asian War, 1592–1598* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009).
- 19 This is Jonathan Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (New York: Viking, 1984).
- 20 Hansen and Curtis, *Voyages in World History*, 357.
- 21 Peter N. Stearns, Michael Adas, Stuart B. Schwartz and Marc J. Gilbert, *World Civilizations: The Global Experience Vol. 2: 1450 to Present* 5th ed. (New York: Pearson Longman, 2008), 601.
- 22 Rhoads Murphey with Kristin Stapleton, *A History of Asia* 7th ed. (New York: Pearson, 2014), 217–18.
- 23 Valerie Hansen, *The Open Empire: A History of China to 1600* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000).
- 24 See, for example, Kenneth M. Swope, “Bestowing the Double-Edged Sword: Wanli as Supreme Military Commander,” in David Robinson, ed., *Culture, Courtiers and Competition: The Ming Court (1368–1644)* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 61–115, and Harry Miller, *State Versus Gentry in Late Ming China, 1572–1644* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009). In Chinese see Fan Shuzhi, *Wanli zhuan* (Beijing: Renmin daxue chubanshe, 1993), and Fan, *Wan Ming shi* 2 vols. (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2005).
- 25 See David Robinson, *Martial Spectacles of the Ming Court* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); Sarah Schneewind, *Community Schools and the State in Ming China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006); Timothy Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998); and Michael Szonyi, *The Art of Being Governed: Everyday Politics in Late Imperial China* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).
- 26 Notable recent efforts to buck this trend include a pair of books by John Dardess, *A Political Life in Ming China: A Grand Secretary and his Times* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2013), and *Four Seasons: A Ming Emperor and his Grand Secretaries in Sixteenth-Century China* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016). Still, there remains a bit of a gap in coverage for the second half of the fifteenth century.
- 27 See, for example, the coverage provided in Albert Chan, *Glory and Fall of the Ming Dynasty* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982).
- 28 Kenneth M. Swope, *The Military Collapse of China's Ming Dynasty, 1618–1644* (London: Routledge, 2014), 1–6; 208–12.
- 29 One notable example is Lynn A. Struve, ed., *Time, Temporality and Imperial Transition: East Asia From Ming to Qing* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005).
- 30 For a survey of the New Qing History field, see Joanna Waley-Cohen, “The New Qing History,” *Radical History Review* 88 (Winter 2004), 193–206.
- 31 In addition to politically motivated criticism from China, referenced below, their interpretations were not unchallenged by more traditionally oriented historians working in the United States. See, for example, Ping-ti Ho, “In Defense of Sinicization: A Rebuttal of Evelyn Rawski's Reenvisioning the Qing,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 57.1 (Feb. 1998), 123–55; and Pei Huang, *Reorienting the*

- 32 See a summary of the debates and controversies in Li Aiyong, “New Qing History and the Problem of ‘Chinese Empire’ – Another Impact and Response?” *Contemporary Chinese Thought* 47.1 (2016), 13–29; and Mario Cams, “Recent Additions to the New Qing History Debate,” *Contemporary Chinese Thought* 47.1 (2016), 1–4.
- 33 Most notable in this respect are Peter Perdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005); and Joanna Waley-Cohen, *The Culture of War in China: Empire and Military Under the Qing Dynasty* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006).
- 34 See David M. Robinson, *Martial Spectacles of the Ming Court* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013). On the Han dimensions of the Ming, see Shin, chapter 10 below.
- 35 Tonio Andrade, *The Gunpowder Age: China, Military Innovation and the Rise of the West in World History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016). Andrade, in turn, builds upon the work of a variety of other scholars, most notably Sun Laichen.
- 36 On the influence of Hongwu and his legislation on the Ming as a whole, see Edward L. Farmer, *Zhu Yuanzhang and Early Ming Legislation: The Reordering of Ming Society following the Era of Mongol Rule* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), and Sarah Schneewind, ed., *Long Live the Emperor! Uses of the Ming Founder Across Six Centuries of East Asian History*, (Minneapolis, MN: Center for Early Modern History, 2008).
- 37 On the evolution of the Ming military, see Kenneth M. Swope, “The Three Great Campaigns of the Wanli Emperor, 1592–1600: Court, Military and Society in Late Sixteenth-Century China,” (Ph.D. Diss., University of Michigan, 2001), chapter 2; Yu Zhijia, *Mingdai junhu shixi zhidu* (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 1987); He Zhiting and Wang Xiaowei, *Zhongguo bing zhi shi* (Taipei: Zhongguo wenhua shi congshu, 1997), chapter 8; and Liew Foon Ming, *The Treatises on Military Affairs of the Ming Dynastic History (1368–1644)* 2 vols (Hamburg: Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde ostasiens, 1998).
- 38 See the excellent discussion in Andrade, *The Gunpowder Age*, chapters 4 and 9.
- 39 See Dennis O. Flynn and Arturo Giraldez, “Born with a Silver Spoon: The Origin of World Trade in 1571,” *Journal of World History* 6.2 (Fall 1995), 201–21.
- 40 On the imperialistic dimensions of the Ming tributary system in general and the Zheng He expeditions in particular, see Edward L. Dreyer, *Zheng He: China and the Oceans in the Early Ming Dynasty, 1405–1433* (New York: Longman, 2007), and Geoff Wade, “The Zheng He Voyages: A Reassessment,” *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 78.1 (2005), 37–58. On the tributary system as a mechanism for international stability, see David Kang, *East Asia Before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).
- 41 An early examination of this phenomenon is David Johnson, Andrew Nathan, and Evelyn Rawski, eds., *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985).
- 42 See, for example, Chun-shu Chang and Shelley Hsueh-lun Chang, *Crisis and Transformation in Seventeenth-century China: Society, Culture and Modernity in Li Yü’s World* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1992), and Chang and Chang, *Redefining History: Ghosts, Spirits and Human Society in P’u Sung-*

ling's World (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1998).

PART I

INSTITUTIONS



We begin our foray into the Ming world with a series of essays on institutions, both formal and informal, explicit and implicit. As Thomas Nimick reminds us, for people in the Ming world, whether they consciously thought about it or not, the institutions of the state were part of their daily existence. They were enmeshed in a dizzying array of personal and private institutions ranging from military units and militia to religious orders to merchant networks to lineage organizations. Taken together these multifarious institutions constituted the skeletal framework of the Ming world.

Accordingly we start with a survey of the omnipresent but ever changing influence of the Ming state in society. One of the most striking features of the Ming state, especially for historians of empires and their attendant bureaucracies, is the “comparatively small and streamlined government apparatus” in the words of Thomas Nimick. As he notes, this also meant that the operations and functioning of the state were heavily dependent upon the character of individual emperors and their interactions with civil officials, military officers, eunuchs, and other elements of society. And while it has been amply demonstrated that many Ming emperors had shortcomings that undermined their capacity

to rule and were surrounded by less than stellar advisers, the ability of the Ming state to adapt and thrive for nearly three centuries bespeaks the underlying strengths of Ming institutions and their fitness for Chinese society.

Along these lines, as has been observed since the Ming period itself, the shadow of the august Ming founder, Zhu Yuanzhang, also known by his reign title Hongwu (Overflowing Martiality), hung heavy over his descendants. In fact one might argue that his personal character and influence upon state policies and institutions was the greatest of any dynastic founder. Indeed, he has been compared to no less a personage than Chairman Mao himself regarding the scope of his influence.¹ Yet, as seen throughout this book, that does not mean that there were not profound social, economic, and even institutional changes over the course of the Ming. But they were often couched in terms that implied filial adherence to the dictates of the founder. As an example, certain titles for military positions and institutions remained constant across the course of the dynasty, but the actual duties and responsibilities of the office holders changed considerably. Likewise, consider the position of grand secretary (*da xueshi*). This post originated in 1382 with the founder's purge of high government officials in the wake of an alleged plot by the prime minister to overthrow the emperor.² It started out at the rank of just 5a (amongst 9 grades of officials, with 1a being the highest) and appointees were to assist the emperor with paperwork and tutor the Heir Apparent.³ But the power and influence of the grand secretaries steadily increased so that by the late Ming they were de facto prime ministers, with grand secretaries such as Zhang Juzheng (1525–82) being accounted the most powerful officials in the entire empire.⁴ So despite the appearance of conservative institutional stasis in the Ming, recent revisionist research has revealed just how dynamic and flexible Ming institutions were in practice.

Nonetheless, Nimick's overview highlights just how crucial personalities, power blocks and interest groups could be in the Ming. Emperors may have possessed autocratic authority in theory but they were forced to share that authority with the men who actually administered the realm and interacted with its subjects on a daily basis. This issue was compounded by the fact that after the first few reigns, emperors often came to the throne in their minority and were sheltered in the Forbidden City for much of their lives. This allowed for the formation of factions and cliques that came to dominate the political landscape. Policy changes were often the result of these shifting tides, though throughout the Ming it was true that strong-willed rulers or ministers could effect real change; that was one of the advantages of the autocratic system in practice. But seldom were they in a position to do

so, or “drain the swamp” in modern parlance owing to the ever-changing nature of the political landscape, which constantly witnessed the rise and fall of political figures owing to the aforementioned machinations. This climate is ably portrayed by Nimick’s overview of the relationship between Ming rulers, the state, and society.

The next essay, by Sally Church, brings us to another very solid manifestation of Ming institutional strength—the shipyards that produced some of history’s most famous ships. Even if their true purpose and import is often misrepresented in popular histories and textbooks, the significance of the so-called “treasure ships” as a symbol of Ming power and influence in Asia and the wider world is undeniable.⁵ But Church goes beyond the early Ming to offer a detailed analysis of the contents of a treatise on shipbuilding from the mid-Ming. The work is vitally important because we have little accurate information on ships and shipbuilding from Zheng He’s era. Much of what modern historians think they know has actually been extrapolated from late Ming novels about the Zheng He voyages.⁶ But by consulting actual shipbuilding manuals from the mid-Ming, one can gain fascinating insights into how things may have functioned at the start of the dynasty.

A key theme that emerges from Church’s analysis involves the sophistication of the Ming bureaucracy and the desire to maintain checks and balances. One gains a real appreciation for the thought that went into selecting and using the best building materials by utilizing resources from all over the vast Ming empire. Problems of countering corruption and maintaining accountability, also noted by Masato Hasegawa in reference to military supplies in the northeast Asian military theater later in this volume, are also evidenced throughout this chapter. Moreover, we see how supposedly generalist Confucian bureaucrats often acquired significant specialized knowledge over the course of their careers and put that knowledge to good use for both the state and their fellow officials. As someone who has read lots of documents pertaining to Ming military institutions, I can attest that Church’s findings concerning the shipbuilding industry have parallels elsewhere.

Building upon the foundation sketched out by Nimick, Church shows us how officials managed their interactions with the state and sought to observe its dictates through the prism of local realities. Thus, we get a glimpse of how the state operated through this particular institution. The efficiency (or lack thereof) of the Ming bureaucracy is amply demonstrated through the careful calculations of cost, labor, and the like that make up much of the discussion herein. Indeed, this chapter is a fine example of how state institutions actually worked and responded to the

challenges put before them.

Finally, this chapter offers useful insights for comparative historians of shipbuilding and naval affairs. Technical details of the shipbuilding process, materials, and labor organization are included in the Longjiang manual that forms the primary basis for Church's analysis. As elsewhere, variations in terminology, materials, and even weights and measures could present difficulties for those tasked with overseeing ship construction. They also pose significant challenges for modern historians looking to understand these processes and reconstruct the ships. The author's ability to navigate these texts is commendable.

Tonio Andrade follows in the third chapter with a discussion of the early Ming military, focusing on the adoption and deployment of gunpowder weapons. Drawing upon his extensive research into the history of gunpowder weapons in China, Andrade explodes myths about Ming military incompetence and non-competitiveness. In the process he firmly situates the Ming at the forefront of the early modern Eurasian gunpowder empires, which are discussed at more length in Edward Farmer's contribution below. Again bringing personality into the analysis, Andrade focuses on the military choices and campaigns of Yongle (r. 1403–24), the ambitious son of the founder who first usurped the throne from his nephew then disobeyed his father's injunctions by launching wars into Vietnam (discussed by Whitmore below), and Central Asia. In both of these conflicts guns proved essential to Ming successes, even if the final results were less than ideal. In fact it was under Yongle that the Ming established the first dedicated firearms training divisions in the world. These divisions would be in operation, albeit with some significant changes, for the duration of the Ming dynasty.

Paralleling Sally Church's discussion of Ming shipbuilding, one again finds government officials very interested in the technicalities of gun manufacture, operation, and deployment. We find Ming officials discussing the merits of using gunpowder weapons in a variety of settings and against all manner of foes to achieve the hegemonic aims of the state in preserving its position at the apex of the East Asian political order. Obviously, maximizing the potential of gunpowder weapons was of vital importance to the state. Furthermore, the professionalism of Ming soldiers is evidenced by their dedication to drilling and their ability to adapt their fighting styles to a variety of foes and environments, as seen in Roland Higgins' chapter. The continual technical adjustments made by the Ming to make better weapons and make better use of existing weapons is yet another manifestation of the institutional flexibility of the empire.

Next, in chapter four, Yang Wei examines perhaps the most fabled institution of the Ming: the civil service examination system. It was during the Ming that the institution reached its mature form and it offered a means for social mobility that was arguably unparalleled in the early modern world.⁷ Like so many other aspects of Ming life, the founder sought to put his stamp on the examination system and keep it from becoming a vehicle for cronyism and factionalism, not to mention a drag on imperial authority. But, like so many other Ming institutions, his vision ultimately failed to account for the evolution of Ming society within its broader global context.

In effect, as the civil service examination system became more institutionalized, it became both more prestigious and more constricting. It grew harder for holders of lower degrees to enter even the lower ranks of officialdom. And procedures designed to prevent incompetence and corruption became tools for favoritism and the waging of factional disputes.

Central to Yang's discussion is the observation that the rationale for merit evaluations of officials was to serve as a check on corruption and incompetence. But the very way the evaluations were implemented, first by self-reporting and later by specially deputed censorial officials, invited the very corruption it was designed to check. In the end censorial impeachments such as those discussed below by Ying Zhang in her essay on Confucian friendship, became intimately linked to factional affiliations and the resulting political struggles hamstrung government operations at all levels. This was particularly true in the last three decades of the Ming as noted by Yang and by other scholars.⁸

Also relevant in Yang's discussion is the relationship between the throne and the bureaucracy and the emergence of what might be described as a proto "civil society" in opposition to imperial autocracy.⁹ While these networks or factions of officials were not formal institutions, it is worth noting that their ultimate power in shaping the memory of the age has been great indeed. For the memory of the officials purged by the late Ming emperors and/or their eunuch officials have gone down in history as heroes whereas their foes, such as the playwright and official Ruan Dacheng, discussed in multiple essays below, remain infamous, even if the ongoing reexamination of sources suggests a much hazier version of history.

Continuing Andrade's discussion of frontier conflicts, Roland Higgins offers in chapter five a detailed analysis of the politics of border control in the mid-sixteenth century. Unsurprisingly, strong personalities come to the fore in this chapter as powerful frontier officials were forced to

navigate the choppy waters of factional court politics. Traditionally this period of Ming history has been viewed as a nadir of military power and the era most representative of the deleterious combination of powerful corrupt ministers alongside a disinterested monarch. While not rejecting these characterizations entirely, Higgins offers a more nuanced examination that takes into account both the broader context and the strategic problematic of the empire as a whole.

He presciently notes that borders in the Ming, not unlike borders in the present era, served as zones for opportunity and conflict. This was the case not only for those officials and subjects who lived along those borders, but also for those back in the capital whose careers could be made or broken based upon decisions reached concerning such border crises. Returning to the institutional framework of this section of the book, this chapter also underscores how networks of officials operated in times of crisis. Local officials needed friends in Beijing to gain support for their policies and initiatives. Conversely, those in the capital could quickly find themselves out of favor (or worse) if some disaster took place on a distant frontier that could somehow be traced to them by their political rivals.

Furthermore, these political debates are seen as important enough that they are still analyzed today by political scientists seeking to explain Chinese political and military behavior and strategic culture in a historical context. In other words, these problems and their various solutions have been interpreted as quintessentially “Chinese,” an argument for the ongoing significance of Ming ideas and institutions if there ever was one. Perhaps most salient is the realization of how important borders, and the goods and people that flowed through them, were to the Ming world. While a veneer of self-satisfied isolation might have existed in official circles, the reality was far messier and not even the Great Wall itself could stem the tide.

This intimate connection between individuals and institutions remains at the heart of the Ming world. Everyone belonged to multiple institutions and all institutions were themselves the product of group and individual desires and initiatives. As with any state, an examination of its core institutions reveals much about the overarching goals and vision of the Ming rulers and their advisers. But a closer examination of how these institutions operated provides a much richer picture of life at all levels of the hierarchy.

NOTES

- 1 On Hongwu's legacy and influence, see Sarah Schneewind, ed., *Long Live the Emperor! Uses of the Ming Founder Across Six Centuries of East Asian History* (Minneapolis, MN: Center for Early Modern History, 2008). On comparisons of him to Mao, see Anita M. Andrew and John A. Rapp, *Autocracy and China's Rebel Founding Emperors: Comparing Chairman Mao and Ming Taizu* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000).
- 2 On the so-called Hu Weiyong plot, see Ma Li, "Legitimacy as the Limit of Absolute Power: The Case of Zhu Yuanzhang," *Journal of Asian History* 39.1 (2005), 1–22.
- 3 See the entry in Charles Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1985), 466–7.
- 4 On Zhang Juzheng, see DMB, 53–61; Chen Shengxi, *Diguo Muse: Zhang Juzheng yu Wanli xingzheng* (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 2012); and Liu Zhiqin, *Zhang Juzheng: Da Ming shoufu* (Beijing: Xinhua shudian, 2014).
- 5 There are even Zheng He slot machines in Las Vegas casinos!
- 6 See the overview in Edward L. Dreyer, *Zheng He: China and the Oceans in the Early Ming Dynasty, 1405–1433* (New York: Longman, 2006).
- 7 On this issue, particularly in the subsequent Qing dynasty, see Benjamin A. Elman, *Civil Examinations and Meritocracy in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).
- 8 See, for example, Harry Miller, *State Versus Gentry*, and Swope, *Military Collapse*.
- 9 This issue is treated at length in John Dardess, *Blood and History in China: The Donglin Faction and its Repression, 1621–1627* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002).

CHAPTER 1

MAPPING THE BACKGROUND

The uncertain influence of the Ming state and imperial
leadership



Thomas G. Nimick



Map 1.1 Map of the Ming empire

Few aspects of life in the Ming period were untouched by the state's pervasive influence. It was a background reality like the weather; sometimes it was helpful and sometimes a burden. For many it shaped what was valued in society. The state was particularly important for those with ambition or a desire for reform, because it defined the paths that they could follow. On the state, moreover, rested the welfare and safety of the country. Yet the functioning of the state over the course of the Ming period varied greatly. In part because there was an emphasis upon preserving a comparatively small and streamlined governmental apparatus, its operations became heavily dependent on the character of individual emperors and on their interactions with civil officials, eunuchs, and military officials. Thus it is important for understanding other developments in the Ming to map them against the evolution of the state's operations and the chronology of imperial leadership.¹

THE FOUNDING ERA

The Ming state took shape within a rebellion against the Mongol Yuan dynasty. The leader of the rebellion, Zhu Yuanzhang, had grown up in poverty and famine in the Huai region of North China. His experience as a commoner gave him strong views about the potential for officials to abuse people. At the same time he needed to develop state structures to govern captured territory and to extract from it the resources to support his military forces. Initially he adopted many of the existing structures of the Yuan state and even confirmed Yuan officials in office. This initial bureaucratic structure was then developed in line with Song dynasty precedents by the scholarly men whom Zhu recruited as his advisors.

However, based on the Yuan model, central governance was divided between three branches. The Central Secretariat was the primary body for formulation of policy for civilian government. The Central Military Commission served in the same role for military policy. The Censorate was designed as a check on the other two bodies. As the country stabilized, the Central Secretariat emerged as the most powerful of the three bodies. By design, policy deliberations rested in the hands of experienced senior officials.

In the first reign, however, Zhu Yuanzhang felt that his views on policy should overrule any deliberations of officials. He prioritized the role of government in protecting and supporting the common people and viewed officialdom with distrust. Although he supported the development of a uniform legal code and regularized bureaucratic procedures for civilian administration, he acted outside the legal structure when he felt it was justified. The emperor's increasing certainty about his own views led to great uncertainty and even personal risk for serving officials, because the emperor did not obey the constraints on punishments any more than he abided by any other rules; many officials suffered extreme punishments or lost their lives as the result of his judgments.²

This situation culminated in the emperor's decision in 1380 to change the structure of central governance. The story was that the Chief Councilor, at the head of the Central Secretariat, was plotting to carry out a coup. Perhaps he was concerned that the inconsistent decisions by the emperor were undermining the development of a stable structure for the government. In any case, the emperor had the Chief Councilor executed and then abolished the head offices for each of the three branches of government. The military structure later developed into five separate commands and the operations of the Censorate were later

recentralized, but for civilian administration the emperor eliminated the entire Central Secretariat and decreed that all authority to set policy would be exercised directly by the person of the emperor. To prevent officials from later regaining control of policy, he decreed that anyone who suggested the re-establishment of the Central Secretariat should be executed.

This prohibition was strengthened when it was used by the third emperor, Zhu Di, as an excuse to usurp the throne. He claimed that his nephew as the second emperor had listened to advice from his advisors to re-establish some sort of central executive body. As a result, for the rest of the dynasty no one dared suggest a change in the structure for setting policy.

At the same time, the regularized structures for administration took hold and were strengthened by the recruitment of officials through competitive examinations. Routine administration was ably staffed and functioned about as well as a bureaucratic structure could, as long as changes in policy did not interfere. The structure for the formulation of policy, however, depended on the person serving as emperor. The character and abilities of the individual emperors varied widely.

Under the founding emperor Zhu Yuanzhang (Hongwu reign, 1368–1398) regularized structures and procedures were established but were also regularly overridden by *ad hoc* decisions by the emperor.³ At the local level his rule restored order after the breakdown of effective administration in the Yuan period. His deep interest in ensuring that local officials did not abuse commoners led him to develop systems of locally run tax collection with no direct role for officials. His concerns about the welfare of the governed also encouraged those who embraced the ideals of Confucian governance. The emperor soon found that, even with his energy and experience, the concentration in his person of all authority to set policy was a heavy burden. He recruited low-level officials of proven ability to serve as secretaries to help him organize the work. The emperor was also suspicious of officials and paranoid about threats to his hold on power. He purged and executed many officials and came to rely heavily on eunuchs serving on the palace staff as personal agents. Many officials saw the problems of the reign as due to the personality of the emperor and hoped that their work on the more stable structure would come to fruition once he was no longer there to override it.

Initially the rule of the founding emperor's grandson, Zhu Yunwen (Jianwen reign, 1399–1402) promised more orderly government operations.⁴ He had observed the interactions between his grandfather

and officials and embraced making the structure work as planned. He apparently admired the persistence of officials dedicated to the good of the country even at great personal risk to themselves. So he drew together a body of officials recognized for their ability and gave them voice in the setting of policy. This encouraged officials who embraced the ideals of beneficent government. What might have resulted from this level of trust is unknown because it failed to fend off usurpation by his uncle, son of the founding emperor.

Despite the usurpation, the rule of Zhu Di (Yongle reign, 1403–1424) actually strengthened the overall stability of administrative structures and operations in the central government.⁵ The usurper was a decisive ruler and made policy decisions in support of his desire to establish a broader state similar to the realm that the Mongols had ruled. For civilian government he first made clear that he would not tolerate any discussion of the legitimacy of his holding of the throne. Beyond that he saw orderly administration as useful for his broader interests, so he recruited a body of younger capable officials to operate the structure that had been established. He developed what became known as the Grand Secretariat, which came to function as a coordinating body for deliberation of policy, but he kept it as an advisory rather than an executive body. He also supported the appointment of capable officials to head the six ministries. He then supported these officials in their efforts to make the bureaucratic structure operate efficiently. With his support they made examinations the key route to higher office and standardized the content on which the examinations focused. Approved texts were distributed to the official schools in each local jurisdiction. They also made use of officials from the Censorate to supervise and control regional administration, and to carry out specific tasks. In general, morale within the ranks of officials was high and problems were actively addressed.

Changes came from his broader initiatives; the emperor reorganized the military and used eunuchs to provide oversight and control. He also used eunuchs in major diplomatic roles, such as the leadership of naval expeditions to the Indian Ocean.⁶ He also became embroiled in a costly venture in the neighboring state of Annam (in modern day Northern Vietnam), which was briefly annexed as the province of Jiaozhi. Administratively, he used the Embroidered Uniform Guard, part of military tasked with defending the palace, to create a secret police and prison system for controlling officialdom and created the eunuch-run Eastern Depot with the same functions for controlling the military. The fiscal demands of his imperial initiatives ended up breaking the locally run tax collection system established by the founding emperor and pushed responsibility for tax collection back into the hands of local

magistrates. They in turn developed local *ad hoc* solutions to meet the fiscal demands. As the throne was passed to his son, control over local administration had begun to slip from the hands of central officials.⁷

Civil administration did not change much under the short reign of Zhu Gaozhi (Hongxi reign, 1425). He had a wealth of experience serving as regent while his father was on campaign and was just as decisive. He saw the value of working with the senior officials with whom he had experience and provided strong support for the existing patterns of government. He arranged that the grand secretaries, who were of low rank, be given nominal appointments at a much higher level in the outside bureaucracy so that they would have stronger standing in court rituals. He did not share his father's vision for a broader state and was concerned about the financial burden that they imposed, so he curtailed the grander, and expensive, special projects that had been entrusted to eunuchs and handed his son a more fiscally sound state.

There were new developments in the structure of government under Zhu Zhanji (Xuande reign, 1426–1435). He was well informed about all aspects of governance because he had been a favorite of his grandfather and had been included in military campaigns and policy deliberation. He was decisive and also appreciative of the benefits of stable civilian administration. He supported a major reform put forward by the grand secretaries to address the loss of control over local administration. They proposed that appointments to key prefectures should be made through recommendations by senior officials. After initial appointments strengthened central control over local administration, the practice of using recommendations spread more broadly and encouraged lower officials to support the policies set in the center. The emperor also formalized the use of touring censors to evaluate the performance of local and regional administration. With regard to foreign policy, the emperor decided to withdraw from Annam and focused military effort on the northern border. He maintained the other structural arrangements and set up a school to improve the training of eunuchs. He also opened another path to advancement when he recruited into influential positions within the administrative structure for eunuchs educated men who were willing to be castrated.⁸

THE MIDDLE PERIOD

The ascension to the throne of his son Zhu Qizhen (Zhengtong reign, 1436–1449) as a child of eight was the beginning of increased opportunities for others to influence policy.⁹ Under the first five decisive emperors, influence had come from carrying out their wishes. When

dealing with impressionable or passive emperors the key to influence became winning the favor or trust of the emperor or an emperor's proxy. This was a competitive zero-sum game in which anyone's gain meant a loss of influence for others and it came to characterize Ming politics for the duration of the dynasty. Initially in this reign the emperor's grandmother was his proxy and she chose to trust the senior officials who had served in the previous reign. This trust, however, was more easily challenged than officials' previous links with decisive emperors. Some officials who had succeeded in the examinations but had found their road to advancement blocked or curtailed by the system of recommendations charged the senior leaders with using the system of recommendations to develop and perpetuate a self-interested faction.¹⁰ Although the attack did not break the trust of the Grand Empress Dowager it established a precedent for mounting similar challenges in later reigns. Civilian administration continued under the same leadership and policies up until her death in 1442.

During the period dominated by the Grand Empress Dowager, the eunuch Wang Zhen, who had been recruited through the program of voluntary castration, served as the young emperor's tutor and adopted a strategy of catering to the emperor's whims. The senior officials and even the Grand Empress Dowager attempted to intervene and remove Wang but were unable to overcome the emperor's insistence on having him at hand; the will of a determined emperor, even as a boy, had the force of law and could not be overcome. Wang curried favor with the young emperor by playing to his dreams of martial greatness. A number of campaigns were pursued in his name and victories celebrated.

Once the Grand Empress Dowager died in 1442 the officials who enjoyed her trust also lost much of their influence. Only the most senior of them retained some prestige for having served multiple emperors. The emperor chose to make Wang the formal head of the eunuch administration and also head of the eunuch-run Eastern Depot, with its secret police and prison. Wang was also able to gain control of the Embroidered Uniform Guard and its prison. He then recruited allies among officials, purged opponents, and took control of central policy.¹¹ Through all of this, administration at lower levels was not heavily affected. Wang's cultivation of favor with the emperor culminated in an emperor-led campaign against Mongol raids that resulted in the capture of the emperor and the death of Wang and many senior officials in 1449.

A reigning emperor in the hands of the enemy created uncertainty about who would exercise the imperial authority. At the outset of the campaign the emperor had put his younger brother in charge of government affairs in his absence, but with limited authority. Against

the backdrop of who would carry the blame for the disaster, officials and eunuchs initially competed to propose policy to the imperial house as a whole. Some officials proposed that moving the government to the south would be best for the safety of the imperial house. The most senior remaining official in charge of military policy, acting in the tradition of decisive leadership by officials, successfully made the case that it was possible to ensure safety militarily while remaining in the north. Another senior official stepped forward and worked out a clarification of imperial authority with the empress dowager: the emperor's brother would serve as regent for the emperor's son and heir apparent.

That arrangement then proved insufficient because it left authority in the hands of the emperor controlled by the Mongols. So a group of leading officials enthroned the younger brother, Zhu Qiyü (Jingtai reign, 1450–1456). Even this step did not entirely resolve the problem because the new emperor remained uncertain whether his claim of imperial authority was secure. In the early days of his reign, officials who had advocated for a vigorous policy of defense were able to show him how his desire to minimize his brother's possible claim aligned with their policies. Their close alignment emerged as the dominant force in the formation of policy.¹² This group of officials took strong steps to strengthen military defense and they moved to address other pressing problems, such as repairs to the dikes on the Yellow River and the Grand Canal.¹³

The decisiveness in the formation of policy, however, was on the part of officials rather than the new emperor. Their influence was based on his trust in them, but this link of trust was vulnerable and came under attack from competing officials and eunuchs. First the challengers contested the alignment through debates about policy with regard to the captured emperor. The dominant group of officials had an interest in minimizing this debate and returned to the filling of posts through recommendations in order to limit opposing voices and promote supporters. Their challengers launched vicious attacks on the leaders as self-interested and a number of officials were forced from office.¹⁴ Other challengers also targeted the emperor's uncertainty by proposing to him that he could consolidate his authority by changing the heir apparent from his brother's son to his own. The entire situation encouraged factional strategies among officials.

An opportunity for the challengers to leverage competing claims to imperial authority emerged in 1457. The reigning emperor was ill, his son had died and he had no heir, and the captured emperor Zhu Qizhen, who had been returned by the Mongols in 1450, was at hand. An ambitious group of military and civil officials and eunuchs restored Zhu

Qizhen to the throne (Tianshun reign, 1457–1464). Initially they enjoyed the restored emperor's favor but soon lost his trust due to their flagrant pursuit of self-interest and then a falling out among themselves. To justify their own actions they arranged the purge and execution of the faction of officials who had saved the dynasty in 1449.¹⁵ They then revived the use of recommendations in an attempt to build a loyal supporting faction.¹⁶ After they turned on each other their strategies promoted the development of further factional alignments among officials and eunuchs. Factional competition dominated policy until the emperor's death in 1464 led to the passing of the throne to his sixteen-year-old son.

Zhu Jianshen (Chenghua reign, 1465–1487) hated the factional politics of his father's reign and despite his young age took immediate measures to remove the leaders of the factions and the more abusive eunuchs.¹⁷ In his determination not to be controlled by any faction he often sought compromise positions and never severely punished anyone attacked by another faction. The use of recommendations declined because the emperor permitted them only when there was no partisan taint. He was partial to those who earned his favor but was not vindictive against those who lost it. The strongest influence on him in the early part of the reign was Lady Wan in the palace. She dominated policy for about the first decade but mostly used the power to gain lands for her family and, for people in her entourage, appointments through special imperial decree. This mostly affected the territory closest to the capital.¹⁸ Outside of her concerns policy was still debated and decided.¹⁹ In 1476 the eunuch Wang Zhi, who had been introduced by the Lady Wan, earned the emperor's favor by excelling at carrying out investigations in disguise. The emperor then authorized him to set up a new police and investigative agency called the Western Depot that Wang then used to terrorize and intimidate officials and the court. Wang dominated policy until he lost the favor of the emperor in 1481 in a dispute with another eunuch. Although the emperor then put stronger constraints on eunuchs and engaged more with officials, no stronger figure emerged to gain his favor and policy formation drifted until his death in 1487 passed the throne to his young son.

The young Zhu Youtang (Hongzhi reign, 1488–1505) had a thorough Confucian education and took it seriously. He was dismayed by the failures of his father's reign and saw that many of the problems had been caused by competition for his father's favor. He decided that he would put his trust in officials dedicated to Confucian thinking. In his reign, however, initiative lay almost entirely with officials and the situation fostered competition among them to be seen as the most upright Confucians. In the early days there was a strong consensus among these

competing officials to remove corrupt favorites, overturn unjust verdicts, and to restore regular procedures. Major problems, such as flooding of the Yellow River and the Grand Canal, were effectively addressed. But on other issues the emperor was caught between competing officials.²⁰ His death in 1505 passed the throne to his son at the age of 13.

Young Zhu Houzhao (Zhengde reign, 1506–1521) favored anyone able to fulfill his whims and yet he was capable enough to avoid being controlled by anyone.²¹ His interest in government was how it could facilitate what he wanted to do; the impact on government depended on who held his favor at a particular time. When he came to the throne a group of young eunuchs already had his favor as companions on various adventures, such as sneaking out of the palace in disguise. Liu Jin, the chief among them, became the emperor's particular favorite and was granted control over administration when he figured out how to exploit to his advantage the circumstances of fiscal administration and the emperor's ignorance.²²

Because over time errors and fraud in local tax records had made it impossible for local officials to collect the full tax quota and factional struggles had blocked any action to address the problem, in the procedure for evaluations there was a working understanding that local officials were not held accountable for a full quota. At the same time the emperor was frustrated that officials had denied him monies that he demanded. Liu maintained that officials were not providing the emperor money because they were corrupt and failing in their duties, and that he could remedy the situation. The emperor's observations of factional infighting and mutual charges of self-interest in his father's reign made this account plausible so the emperor handed Liu full authority over administration.

Instead of using existing bureaucratic channels, Liu instituted structural changes to place officials at every level of the bureaucracy under the authority of eunuchs from the palace administration. Liu used the full weight of the eunuch secret police and prisons to crush any opposition. He imposed additional taxes and levied fines for failure to fulfill quotas. He delivered money to the emperor, but his measures disrupted administration at every level.

Liu's power was dependent upon the emperor's trust. Attempts by officials to break that trust proved fruitless because attacks on moral grounds were undermined by the emperor's doubt about their moral standing. Jealous eunuchs were more successful because they were able to suggest that Liu, with his strong control of the bureaucracy, was becoming a direct threat to the person of the emperor. When the

emperor became convinced of the risk in 1510, Liu was quickly eliminated and officials undid the changes to the structure of administration that Liu had introduced.

Following Liu's death, the emperor authorized eunuch commissioners to make direct requisitions for money from provincial officials. These created hardship but did not affect the structure of administration. His interests also turned to military exploits and military commander Jiang Bin became his favorite. At Jiang's suggestion the emperor participated in military exercises in Beijing using skilled troops from the border and then sought to travel to military garrisons on the northern border. The emperor's increasing interest in military exploits led him to ignore administration and even imperial rituals. In 1517 he created a new identity for himself, made his alter ego a general and assigned him to a military garrison on the northern border.²³

In the decade following the execution of Liu Jin, the operations of civil administration proceeded without interference other than financial requisitions or imperial visits. The senior grand secretary began to exercise a level of authority close to that of a prime minister, but without changing his underlying role as advisor. By the end of the reign the senior grand secretary had earned widespread support from officials for his efforts to minimize the disruption by the emperor and he had developed the disciplinary means to quell dissenting officials. In 1519, the rebellion of an imperial prince gave the emperor an excuse to go on an expedition to the southeast. His tour through central China in 1520 caused much disruption and few mourned when he died without an heir in early 1521.

Senior Grand Secretary Yang Tinghe coordinated with the empress dowager and eunuchs to bring the deceased emperor's cousin, Zhu Houcong (Jiajing reign, 1522–1566), to the throne at the age of 13.²⁴ The new emperor soon showed his concern about ritual correctness, a concern that he would retain for the rest of his life. Over time he also proved that he was “emotionally needy, always starved for reassurance, respect, and affection.”²⁵ Because he had been born and raised in a princely estate in Huguang he had no pre-existing connections with eunuchs in the palace or with military officials. So the focus of his attention was on the high officials with whom he had regular contact. Across the course of his reign, five officials enjoyed a key relationship with the emperor and their character became the dominant force that shaped administration.

Initially Yang Tinghe exercised the strongest influence. In the month that it took for the emperor to arrive in Beijing, Yang took steps to

consolidate control, eliminate the former emperor's favorites, and reset many aspects of administration. Yang was not aware of the emperor's personal interest in ritual concerns when, on his own initiative, he took steps to define the new emperor's ritual relationship with earlier emperors. For Yang any perceived irregularity in the succession was a significant risk, particularly in the light of two attempted revolts by Ming princes in the previous reign. To minimize justification for a usurpation, he set up rituals that would have the new emperor become the adopted son of the Hongzhi emperor. As a part of that plan the new emperor would carry out rituals appropriate to uncle and aunt for his own parents.

Although the young emperor was not convinced that the reasons of state overrode his ritual obligations to his own parents, he initially went along with the plan. He respected Yang and was likely intimidated by him in his role as the leading official in the empire. The emperor likely also wanted affirmation and approval while assuming the momentous role of ruler. He supported Yang's efforts to bring order to administration. Between 1521 and 1524 many of the problematic practices of the previous reign were abolished.²⁶ Particularly noteworthy was the elimination of many eunuch roles outside the capital. Yang enjoyed support among officials because it appeared that he had effectively restored the role of an effective leader of the civilian bureaucracy that had been missing since the Hongwu Emperor's purge in 1380.²⁷

Yet the emperor's own concerns for his ritual obligations to his parents were acute because, since he was an only son, Yang's design meant leaving his parents without a ritual heir. The new emperor already knew that his will should be the final word on decisions because he had been able to alter the arrangements for his entrance into the capital. Without support, however, it was not clear that he could assert his will concerning the rituals related to the succession.

To the best of his ability Yang used disciplinary tools to prevent officials from voicing support of the emperor's position. His methods set precedents for later factional infighting. Although Yang's faction continued to block support for the emperor after Yang left office in 1524, they had no effective leader. So Zhang Fujing was able to come out in support of the emperor. Zhang was decisive, unyielding to others' views, and unwilling to participate in networks of political patronage. His persistence in the face of the resistance earned the respect of the emperor. Zhang sincerely felt that a case could be made that the emperor's focus on ritual attention to his parents was consistent with the role of emperor as a moral model for society. Zhang provided assurance

for the emperor to insist on his will and to make it happen. He went on to work with the emperor on a wholesale review and revision of imperial ritual practices. Zhang enjoyed the emperor's trust until illness forced his retirement in 1535.

Zhang had reached his position from outside the normal paths of advancement, however, and his role was contested by other officials. While it was hard to claim that he was corrupt or opportunistic, the same could not be said about others who supported the emperor's position. The precedents of Zhang's advancement and the struggles over the ritual controversies set up further competition for influence with the emperor.

The next official who established a dominant relationship with the emperor, Xia Yan, was a different sort of person: smart, articulate, and ambitious. He had a proven record for his ability to master the details of administration and to develop policy. He realized that if he focused on improvements to rituals he could gain the attention of the emperor, so in 1530 he developed a proposal based on the work that Zhang Fujing was already doing. He not only gained the emperor's attention but Xia was appointed Minister of Rites in 1531. Zhang recognized Xia's ambition but his efforts to discredit him were unsuccessful. Instead Xia continued to work with the emperor on ritual issues and in 1537 was made a grand secretary.

Xia's success at gaining the emperor's notice through effective policy recommendations laid out the path for others to try the same. Although this inspired many ideas, each idea became a political threat to others competing for influence. Xia fought the resulting struggles viciously. Few effective decisions were made.

At the same time a high military official named Guo Xun had gained the respect of the emperor by protecting those who supported the emperor's views in the dispute about rituals. Guo was then involved in various ritual practices, but most importantly he supported the emperor in his growing interest in Daoist teachings and practices in his personal ritual life. In 1540 Guo introduced a major Daoist teacher to the emperor. Guo's ties to the emperor and his venality opened up further opportunities for corruption in the region around the capital. He was able to push back against Xia's dominance but otherwise did not have a significant effect on operations of the broader state.

In the midst of his factional struggles, Xia promoted Yan Song as part of his faction and helped him become Minister of Rites without realizing that he was inadvertently setting up a new competitor for the emperor's

favor. The emperor was pleased to have two leading officials competing for his favor. Xia was dismissed in August 1542 and Yan became a grand secretary in September. In 1544 Yan became senior grand secretary. Then in 1545 the emperor brought Xia back as the senior grand secretary and once again had them compete.

In the competition Yan had the advantage. Both composed Daoist prayers that the emperor liked but Xia had a previous history of not approving of some Daoist practices. To regain an advantage he once again advocated for a policy proposal, a military campaign to clear Mongol tribes from the Ordos region. Instead Yan was able to drum up resistance to the plan as it was being implemented and get the leading general impeached for corruption. The general and Xia were executed in 1548.²⁸

Yan Song then capably maintained exclusive influence with the emperor from 1548 to 1562. He affirmed the emperor in whatever ritual practices he adopted. Among officials he established a patronage network to ensure that no serious competitor could emerge. That meant that no one was permitted to carry out policies that resulted in independent credit for another official. This was most unfortunate because it became difficult to recruit effective leadership for efforts to deal with piracy on the southeast coast and violence on the northern border. Only efforts for which the credit went to Yan Song were allowed to proceed.

Yan's successor in the emperor's favor, grand secretary Xu Jie, was politically astute and provided just the reassurance that the increasingly erratic emperor needed. Xu had managed to serve in the grand secretariat for ten years under Yan Song and in 1562 he gained the emperor's trust by meeting his wishes better than Yan. Two months later Yan was dismissed and Xu served for the remaining four years of the reign. Little changed in administration other than prosecutions of the most abusive in Yan Song's network of patronage and corruption.

THE LATE MING

When Zhu Zaihou (Longqing reign, 1567–1572) came to the throne at the age of twenty-nine, he was inclined to entrust administration to the officials whom he felt had maintained order despite his father's increasingly erratic behavior.²⁹ Xu Jie remained as the key official at the beginning of the reign. To his credit, he had encouraged other capable junior officials and, in his preparation of the first steps for the reign, he set out a major reform of administration and removal of irregular

practices and appointments. Xu was also willing to carry out some of the ideas from the junior officials, particularly Zhang Juzheng. For example, trade was once again allowed on the southeast coast and the northern border and this step brought much-needed stability in both areas. Yet another capable official, Gao Gong, felt that he had not been appreciated for his contributions to administrative reform. His attack on Xu resulted in both of them being dismissed in 1567 and 1568 respectively, but strong policy decisions continued under the guidance of Zhang. Gao was returned the Grand Secretariat in 1570 and he and Zhang continued to cooperate on effective policy. The tightening of many standards for official service resulted in more orderly administration and higher morale. This situation continued until the emperor's death in 1572.

Zhu Yijun (Wanli reign, 1573–1620) came to the throne at the age of nine. Zhang Juzheng was trusted by the Empress Dowager to act for the good of the dynasty. Zhang had also cultivated close personal ties with the head of the eunuch administration. Gao Gong's dispute with that leader of the eunuchs about the imperial will resulted in Gao's dismissal in 1572 and left Zhang to exercise his influence without constraint. Zhang benefitted from unique circumstances: he was made the tutor of the boy emperor, he enjoyed the trust of his mother, and he had a good working relationship with the head of the eunuch administration. Moreover, he was serving in a time when the norms of officialdom supported the idea of a high official serving as *de facto* prime minister. He chose to use his authority to engage in strong reform efforts on all aspects of administration from land records and taxation to military organization. He used the tools of discipline to prevent other officials from interfering in the efforts, but also encouraged young officials of proven talent or who had useful ideas. He was attacked for moral lapses but essentially maintained his important personal relationships up until his death in 1582.

Following the death of Zhang, the emperor became the dominant influence on the operations of the state. The emperor had already resented Zhang as a father figure and had disliked being restricted by Zhang's admonitions about what he could do and what money he could spend. He ended up concluding that Zhang's teachings and actions had been self-interested. Furthermore, the mud-slinging memorials that attacked almost anyone in high office suggested that all officials were compromised. He asserted his authority and prevented anyone from exercising it on his behalf. He also decided against allowing anyone to serve as *de facto* prime minister. The emperor then decided to disregard officials' memorials about government policy, particularly those that urged him to restrain himself. Although Zhang's administrative policies

were not overturned, they were no longer supported and no similarly positive policy was enacted. The emperor's inaction with regard to administration became increasingly problematic as the government faced new problems.

The emperor did, however, continue to oversee policy that was touched only peripherally by civil officials. He was closely involved in the oversight of military matters and he continued to support active military measures, including dealing with the Japanese invasion of Korea.³⁰ Indeed, Wanli's emphasis upon military affairs has been interpreted as an effort to reconceptualize the imperial role.³¹ It also helped to reassert the strategic hegemony of the Ming in East Asia, albeit only for a few decades.

One official did manage to reach the emperor and get him to take action to avert a serious famine, but that official did it by providing him a story book with pictures about famine rather than an ordinary memorial. His book drew the attention of the emperor and other members of the imperial household.³² This event did not, however, undo the block on other administrative matters.

Outside of these events, the emperor focused on his own interests and became willful and avaricious. He demanded funds from the public revenues for his private projects. When he met resistance he empowered eunuchs to go to the provinces to collect additional revenues directly.³³ The ranks of eunuchs swelled. These actions created new administrative problems but his unwillingness to work with officials prevented the state from addressing them. Moreover, the exactions by eunuchs fell most heavily on wealthy elite families from which many officials came and this further poisoned relations between the emperor and officials. Policy formation with regard to administration was at a standstill.

Idealistic officials found the emperor's refusal to heed any communication from civil officials galling and many of them sought other ways to pursue their ideals. Some engaged in reform within their offices and documented it in an effort to sustain it. One group in what became the Donglin Party decided that improving the quality of officials could result in better government so they focused on controlling the recruitment through examinations and evaluations. They claimed to be able to decide who was worthy of serving as an official. In doing so they touched the most sensitive aspect of status as an official and generated widespread resistance and deeply defined factions. Many areas of administration were neglected. But because the Donglin's allies and supporters later compiled most of the histories of the era and its strife, they have generally been regarded as righteous heroes standing up

against corruption and imperial lassitude.

Matters became even worse when the emperor began to withhold approval for appointments to senior offices. Deeper conflict developed between the emperor and officials over the issue of succession, which the emperor could not ignore because it was both personal and a critical matter for the state. They urged the recognition of his eldest as heir apparent and he resisted. Even after the heir was designated the emperor still kept a younger son of a favorite concubine in the palace. The debate also produced charges and countercharges in the ongoing factional fights among officials. Once the emperor refused to approve appointments, many offices remained unfilled and even basic administration began to break down. The death of the emperor in 1620 brought hopes among officials for a return to more normal circumstances.

His oldest son Zhu Changluo (Taichang reign, 1620) came to the throne as planned and moved quickly to fill empty posts and recall officials who had been unjustly dismissed or who had resigned in dismay.³⁴ Among these were many from the Donglin Party and it appeared as though they would have the strongest influence on the new emperor. Yet one month later, the emperor's illness and death raised questions of palace intrigue. Even as the emperor was on his deathbed several palace women tried to use the young heir to request that the emperor elevate their status.

The accession of his son Zhu Youjiao (Tianqi reign, 1621–1627), who was not quite 15, involved further palace intrigue, particularly an attempt by powerful palace women to establish themselves as “guides” for the young emperor.³⁵ Their attempt was blocked by the intervention of senior officials who managed to have them removed from the palace. Officials, many of whom had recently returned to office, likely expected to enjoy the young emperor's confidence, but their hopes were undercut by factional struggles among them concerning the circumstances of the previous emperor's death and the role of palace personnel.

With no clear way to determine whom he could trust, the emperor turned for support and comfort to his nursemaid Lady Ke. When “upright” officials challenged him for keeping her in the palace, he and the nursemaid enlisted the aid of a capable eunuch named Wei Zhongxian to handle the situation. With the emperor's support, Wei arranged for the dismissal and sanction of the officials mounting the challenge. At the same time Wei managed to shift the drafting of imperial rescripts from grand secretaries to eunuchs. That move and the selection of grand secretaries were contested for a while, but in the end the serving grand secretaries accommodated themselves to the new

arrangements.

Despite ongoing factional disputes, which were aggravated by the severe defeat of Ming forces by the Manchus in 1621, from 1622 to 1624 an uneasy peace prevailed between the palace and officialdom. The chief grand secretary weighed in to minimize sanctions that were imposed on officials. The factional struggles, however, hampered the development of coherent military policy, which was crucial, given the multiplication of military threats from within and without the empire at the time.³⁶

These problems were eclipsed by the conflict triggered when a few activist members of the Donglin Party attempted to break the emperor's trust in Wei Zhongxian by submitting a direct impeachment of him in July, 1624. Not only did the impeachment fail to break the emperor's trust, but it led to Wei moving against his challengers. He took the accusations made by factional enemies and utilized the disciplinary measures of the Embroidered Uniform Guard to pursue six key officials ruthlessly. He used torture to force the repayment of any bribes they had been accused of accepting. What had been hyperbolic claims for effect in the factional fight became an instrument of terror in his hands. Even opponents of the Donglin were taken aback by the severity of the measures but their efforts to intervene came to nothing. The use of torture to extract "repayments" had a broad impact because it pulled on the networks of supporters to try to raise the money so as to save the imprisoned from further torture or, after each had reportedly died of illness in prison, to help their relatives meet the demands. By the end of 1625 Wei had cowed all officials. Some of the personal repercussions of these struggles are related in Ying Zhang's essay below.

The lists of Donglin sympathizers prepared by their opponents were used to dismiss and humiliate them. In 1626 another seven leaders among them were targeted. One committed suicide and the other six died in prison. No one stepped forward any longer to contest Wei's influence with the emperor. Factional infighting had become dangerous and the decline in it to some extent helped the military efforts that brought victories against the Manchus, but even there competition within the clique around Wei complicated military policy. The fear of Wei also gave rise to widespread sycophancy in memorials and in the building of shrines to honor him in many regions. The emperor himself indulged in his favorite pastime of carpentry and crafts and increasingly left decisions to Wei. So things stood up until the emperor died in the fall of 1627.

The reign of the deceased emperor's younger brother Zhu Youjian

(Chongzhen reign, 1628–1644), who ascended to the throne at 16, began with no one having dominant influence over him and great anxiety among the people under him about the policy that he would adopt and whose advice he would heed.³⁷ Initially the emperor was reserved and cautious, likely because he feared that Wei Zhongxian and his partisans might be a personal threat; he had been warned about the risk of assassination. So administration continued for a few months as it had, but with great uncertainty. Donglin sympathizers hoped that the emperor would not only end their persecution but that he would punish those responsible. Wei Zhongxian and his partisans knew that, without the trusting relationship with the former emperor, their power was weak, but they still had the means to control opponents through fear. They were desperate to prevent being condemned and persecuted in turn. A diverse set of groups were also emerging from a new generation of idealistic officials driven by a sense of dynastic crisis. Their formative experience had been the rise and influence of the Donglin before the persecution and they took it as a model when they organized a variety of literary societies with practical reformist agendas. They all waited to see what the emperor would do.

By late 1627 the emperor concluded that he had adequate support and he went after Wei and his higher-level supporters with a vengeance. It soon became clear that the new emperor desired a renewal of good government and looked to officials to accomplish it. At the same time he wanted to actively discourage factions because he had experienced factional infighting and Wei's quelling of it. He first sought the names of the most abusive officials of the previous reign and, despite initial resistance from those who could be implicated, over a year and a half he managed to identify a good number and had them prosecuted and dismissed. It showed him as a decisive ruler when he had a clear objective in mind.

He also reestablished the formal protocols for proper interaction between officials and the emperor. He sincerely wanted the best advice that officials could offer but it proved impossible to develop consistent policy. The interests of officials were too fragmented and conflicted and there was no clear leadership among them. The emperor had too little knowledge to discern between conflicting opinions. The field was open to those who were best prepared to manipulate his ignorance of policy and his concern about moral government. Effective policy was vulnerable to sabotage and the emperor's bad judgment.

Nowhere was this more evident than on the northeastern frontier.³⁸ In 1628 an effective military commander, Yuan Chonghuan, had met with the emperor personally to discuss the challenge of the Manchus and had

gained the emperor's trust in his policy to retake territory and consolidate it. He was making successful efforts when the Manchus made a raid into China from another quarter in 1630. Partisan opponents saw an opportunity to undermine the emperor's trust in him and their maneuvers, and possible actions by the Manchus to frame him, led to his execution.

The best way to gain the confidence of the emperor proved to be an opportunistic stand against factionalism. This was how Wen Tiren eliminated numerous rivals and reached the Grand Secretariat in 1630 and he continued in the same vein as senior grand secretary from 1633 to 1637. Because his successors used the same approach, they preserved their position at the expense of effective policy.

Ill-informed policy can be seen in the measures taken to deal with roving bandit armies that threatened much of central China and eventually the capital. Successful commanders were undercut by political attacks and interference with supplies. On multiple occasions accepting the "surrender" of bandits ended up perpetuating the problem. Commanders were also transferred to new areas and demanded to perform without sufficient time to develop adequate forces or strategic understanding. Military effectiveness was degraded on every front.

The formation of policy was ineffectual across the board. There was a crisis of supplies for military forces and problems with surtaxes. Even beyond the depredations of the roving bandits social order was breaking down. When the bandit armies began to threaten Beijing, it emerged that its military garrisons were weak and ineffectual. Discussions about what measures to take went nowhere. An official tasked with defending a key pass was so dispirited with the situation that he defected. Discussions about sending the emperor or perhaps a part of the imperial family to the relative safety of the south were inconclusive.³⁹ The emperor's suicide in 1644 as the capital was overrun can be blamed directly on government dysfunction and the inability to develop coherent policy.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF IMPERIAL LEADERSHIP

Variations in the operations of the state under decisive emperors in the early Ming period were similar to those of decisive emperors across the whole history of the Chinese imperial system. Such differences were to be expected with authority centered on the emperor. Later variations were more extreme in the Ming period and were the direct result of the structural changes in 1380 that made policy dependent on the person of the emperor and the character of the individuals who filled that role.

The level of influence exercised by others around the emperor became dependent on the strength of their relationship with the person of the emperor, or occasionally proxies for the emperor. As was shown in the Wanli period, even developing traditions of strong bureaucratic leaders with effective administrative tools could be undone on a whim. Given the pervasive nature of the state in the Ming period, it remains important to map events against the chronology of imperial leadership.

NOTES

- 1 This mapping of state operations in the Ming is informed by general works: Charles O. Hucker, "Ming government," in Denis Twitchett and Frederick W. Mote eds., *Cambridge History of China* (hereafter *CHC*), vol. 8, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 9–105; F. W. Mote, *Imperial China, 900–1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); John W. Dardess, *Ming China, 1368–1644* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012).
- 2 On his relationship with his officials see Frederick W. Mote, *The Poet Kao Ch'i* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1962).
- 3 Resources for the discussion of this reign are Frederick W. Mote, "The Rise of the Ming Dynasty," in *CHC*, vol. 7, 11–57; John D. Langlois, "The Hung-wu reign, 1368–1398," in *CHC*, vol. 7, 107–81.
- 4 For this and the following three reigns see Hok-lam Chan, "The Chien-wen, Yung-lo, Hung-hsi, and Hsüan-te reigns, 1399–1435," in *CHC*, vol. 7, 182–304.
- 5 In addition to the previously cited work see also Shih-Shan Henry Tsai, *Perpetual Happiness: The Ming Emperor Yongle* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2001).
- 6 On the naval expeditions, see Edward L. Dreyer, *Zheng He: China and the Oceans in the Early Ming Dynasty, 1405–1433* (New York: Longman, 2007).
- 7 These developments are summarized in Thomas G. Nimick, "The Selection of Local Officials Through Recommendations in Fifteenth-Century China," *T'oung Pao* 91.1–3 (2005), 128–32.
- 8 Mote, *Imperial China*, 626.
- 9 On this and the following two reigns see Denis Twitchett and Tilemann Grimm, "The Cheng-t'ung, Ching-t'ai, and T'ien-shun reigns, 1436–1464," in *CHC*, vol. 7, 305–42.
- 10 Nimick, "The Selection of Local Officials Through Recommendations in Fifteenth-Century China," 146–56.
- 11 A good summary of the details of this period appears in Philip de Heer, *The Care-Taker Emperor* (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 10–13.
- 12 The best summary of these events appears in de Heer, *The Care-Taker Emperor*, 16–29.
- 13 Mote, *Imperial China*, 653.
- 14 Nimick, "The Selection of Local Officials Through Recommendations in Fifteenth-Century China," 156–60.
- 15 The best coverage of the overall pattern of his reign is de Heer, *The Care-Taker Emperor*.

- 16 Nimick, "The Selection of Local Officials Through Recommendations in Fifteenth-Century China," 162–63.
- 17 For this and the succeeding reign see Frederick W. Mote, "The Ch'eng-hua and Hung-chih reigns, 1465–1505," in *CHC*, vol. 7, 343–402.
- 18 In the capital region the creation of imperial estates created many problems, not only for local people but also for officials traveling to and from the capital. See David M. Robinson, *Bandits, Eunuchs, and the Son of Heaven: Rebellion and the Economy of Violence in Mid-Ming China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 36–7.
- 19 See, for example, the extensive debates on dealing with the movement of Mongol tribes into the Ordos region as described in Arthur Waldron, *The Great Wall of China: From History to Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 96–107.
- 20 An example can be seen in the biography of Wang Shu in *DMB*, 1418–19.
- 21 For this reign see James Geiss, "The Cheng-te reign, 1506–1521," in *CHC*, vol. 7, 403–39.
- 22 The role of eunuchs in the Zhengde reign is fully explored in Robinson, *Bandits, Eunuchs, and the Son of Heaven*.
- 23 See Robinson, *Bandits, Eunuchs, and the Son of Heaven*, 104.
- 24 For this reign see James Geiss, "The Chia-ching reign, 1522–1566," in *CHC*, vol. 7, 440–510. This account is also informed by John W. Dardess, *Four Seasons: A Ming Emperor and His Grand Secretaries in Sixteenth-Century China* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016).
- 25 This aspect of his life is best illustrated in John W. Dardess, *A Political Life in Ming China: A Grand Secretary and His Times* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2013), 153ff.
- 26 Mote, *Imperial China*, 662–3.
- 27 Mote, *Imperial China*, 667.
- 28 This proposal and its political connections are discussed at length in Waldron, 125–39.
- 29 The best account of this reign is in Mote, *Imperial China*, 723–7.
- 30 This revision of previous characterizations of his inattention to government matters is effectively established in Kenneth M. Swope, *A Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 13–40.
- 31 See Kenneth M. Swope, "Bestowing the Double-Edged Sword: Wanli as Supreme Military Commander," in *Culture, Courtiers, and Competition: The Ming Court (1368–1644)* edited by David Robinson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 61–115.
- 32 Timothy Brook, "Telling Famine Stories: The Wanli Emperor and the 'Henan Famine' of 1594," *Études Chinoises*, 34.2 (2015), 163–202.
- 33 A good account of this appears in Harry S. Miller, *State Versus Gentry in Late Ming China, 1572–1644* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 75–94.
- 34 Good coverage of the next three reigns appears in William Atwell, "The T'ai-chang, T'ien-ch'i, and Ch'ung-chen Reigns, 1620–1644," in *CHC*, vol. 7, 585–640.
- 35 This reign is discussed at length in John Dardess, *Blood and History in China: The Donglin Faction and Its Repression, 1620–1627* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002).

- 36 The effects of factionalism and lack of leadership on military policy is discussed in Kenneth M. Swope, *The Military Collapse of China's Ming Dynasty, 1618–44* (London: Routledge, 2014), 35–53.
- 37 The initial period of his reign is covered well in Dardess, *Blood and History*, 150–64. Good coverage of the reign is in Mote, *Imperial China*, 776–810.
- 38 Swope, *The Military Collapse of China's Ming Dynasty*, 70–90.
- 39 Swope, *The Military Collapse of China's Ming Dynasty*, 190–203.

CHAPTER 2

NANJING'S LONGJIANG SHIPYARD TREATISE AND OUR KNOWLEDGE OF MING SHIPS



Sally K. Church

Although Ming China was predominantly a land-based agricultural civilization, it would be a mistake to ignore the lively activities of its population on inland waterways and ocean shores. Both government and private shipping coexisted, but there was often a tension between them, with the government frequently attempting to control and limit private water-based commerce, partly for tax collection purposes and partly to prevent smuggling and piracy. Small-scale merchant and fishing activities were allowed on internal rivers and lakes, but repeated government prohibitions were issued on larger ships going into the oceans or overseas by private sailors or merchants. Adventurers, entrepreneurs, and those fleeing economic hardship also tended to take to the seas, nourishing the Chinese diaspora, particularly in Southeast Asia. Strong control was exerted over private maritime activities during the period of Zheng He's (1371–ca. 1435) maritime expeditions, 1405–1433, but efforts to command the waves were later less successful. While government attention shifted to the northern steppe regions after the capital was moved from Nanjing to Beijing in 1421, maritime trade

flourished in the hands of private traders on the southern and southeastern coasts. When this occurred and other conditions were ripe, piracy and smuggling began to boom, and another arm of the government needed to swing into action: ships of a military and policing nature were needed to protect coastal and inland waterways as well as ports and other cities. As will be seen below, this situation forms the backdrop against which the *Longjiang Shipyard Treatise* (*Longjiang chuanchang zhi*) was written in 1553.

TREATISES ON SHIPBUILDING

Systematic treatises on shipbuilding are almost non-existent in China before 1800. For the most part, the people who knew how to build ships could not write, and the scholar-bureaucrats who were trained to write had very little knowledge about shipbuilding. As noted by the eminent historian of science Joseph Needham, shipbuilders tended to be “illiterate and unable to record their skill,” while those who were capable of writing “had little or no knowledge of the building and handling of ships.”¹ However, the *Longjiang Shipyard Treatise* is one exception.² Written by Li Zhaoxiang (fl. 1537–1553),³ a scholar-official who had been appointed in 1551 to improve the efficiency of Nanjing’s Longjiang Shipyard, this *Treatise* is the result of his investigation into the operation of the shipyard and what was going wrong with it at the time. It thus provides a wealth of information about a government shipbuilding enterprise in mid-sixteenth-century China. Needham called it “one of the treasures of Chinese technological literature.”⁴ It not only tells us a great deal about the history of the shipyard, and describes its facilities and practices, but also contains many practical details about the ships that were produced there: the materials used to build them, the people who constructed them, how long it took to put them together, the division of labour and labour costs, the layout of the shipyard site and how the yard was operated and managed. The *Treatise* provides a window through which to view the broader social and economic context of the mid-Ming period, as well as the practical aspects of shipbuilding.

The purpose of this chapter is to summarise the contents of the *Treatise* and convey the level of detail it contains about the ships that were built in the Longjiang Shipyard. For those who think we have exhausted all there is to know about Chinese ships, it is to counter this claim by showing the kind of information the *Treatise* contains. We begin with a short section providing some background to the shipyard and its role in the Ming period, and then proceed to an examination of chapters 2 and 7 of the work to show the type of information it provides

about the over 20 models, or “rates” (a term from English shipbuilding history), built in the shipyard. Chapter 2 of the *Treatise* contains illustrations and descriptions of the various models built in the shipyard. The discussion of this chapter focuses on the sizes of the various models, which are given in unusual detail, and also highlights passages about the size of the foot measure (*chi*) and the thickness of the planks. Chapter 7 provides a vast amount of information about the labour and materials used to build the ships. The labour section gives the length of time it took to build each model, expressed in work-units, and breaks these down into individual shipbuilding tasks, such as sawing wood, making sails, caulking, metal-working and painting. It also provides labour costs. The section on materials gives detailed lists of the different types and amounts of materials used to build each model. There is so much information in this chapter that we can only present a few examples of the treatment of these subjects. However, from them one can gain an appreciation for the skill of the builders and the scope of imperial building projects more broadly, as also revealed in Aurelia Campbell’s chapter on palace architecture in the present volume.

It is rare to have such a vast amount of information about ships in China before the nineteenth century. The *Treatise* is therefore an important work not only for its own sake but also for comparative purposes.⁵ Furthermore, it is a splendid example of a thorough, systematic treatment of a technical subject in classical Chinese, showing the ability of a Ming bureaucrat to be not only interested in such a subject but also capable of writing about it in such a detailed and insightful way. Finally, the *Treatise* is useful for the light it sheds on another problem regarding Ming ships. Because the Longjiang shipyard was next-door to the Treasure Shipyard (*baochuan chang*), where Zheng He’s ships were built over 100 years before the *Treatise* was written, and because some of its ships were measured in *liao*, the *Treatise* can shed light on the size of Zheng He’s ships, which are also described in *liao* in some sources. A partial motivation behind my investigation into this *Treatise* is that the wealth of information we have about the Longjiang ships contrasts so sharply with the dearth of information we have about Zheng He’s ships. A complete translation of the entire *Treatise* is in process, which it is hoped will make a significant contribution to the literature on Chinese ships in English.

BACKGROUND: THE LONGJIANG SHIPYARD AND THE MING CONTEXT

The Longjiang Shipyard was founded at the beginning of the Ming

period, during the reign of the first emperor, Hongwu (r. 1368–1398). Hongwu had only just wrested the empire from the hands of the Mongols, who had ruled it for nearly a century as the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368). The shipyard was established in Nanjing, which was the capital of the Ming at the beginning of the dynasty, until the third Ming emperor, Yongle (r. 1403–1424), made Beijing the capital in 1421. Located on the Yangzi river in a region full of lakes and waterways, Nanjing had to be defended both from remnants of the Mongol army and from potential contenders for the throne. The navy was therefore an important component of the Ming's defensive military forces. The shipyard was established primarily for military purposes, to build ships for defence and security, but it also produced some ships for grain transport. It did not build any of the ships for Zheng He's maritime expeditions (1405–1433), because the nearby Treasure Shipyard was established for that purpose.

By the time the *Treatise* was completed in 1553, the shipyard had been in operation for approximately 185 years. During that time there had been many changes in maritime attitudes and policies. The most dramatic change was the inauguration of Emperor Yongle's massive shipbuilding programme in preparation for Zheng He's maritime expeditions to "the Western Oceans." Although the Treasure Shipyard, where these ships were built, was separate from the Longjiang Shipyard, the two were located near to each other, in the same northwestern corner of Nanjing. In fact, they were on opposite sides of the Qinhuai River, one north and one south of it, where the river empties into the Yangzi, and they could not help but influence each other to some extent.⁶ During the period of the expeditions, both shipyards were in operation simultaneously.

After the expeditions, the government drastically curtailed its involvement in shipbuilding, owing in part to factional strife at court and a reordering of defence priorities to concentrate on the Mongol threat from Central Asia. Little attention was paid to this sector at that time, and practically no investment was made in government shipbuilding or ship repair, even in the navy for self-defence.⁷ By contrast, private shipbuilding accelerated during this time, for reasons explained below. For a while the lack of government investment did not matter because there was relative peace on China's shores. However, several problems were simmering under the surface. First was the activity of pirates along the Chinese coast, which had been going on even before the beginning of the dynasty. Second was the involvement of Chinese merchants in private commerce, and the temptation for them to engage in illicit trade, smuggling, and piracy, which is referenced in Kenneth Hall's chapter. Third was the increasingly serious corruption in

Chinese society and government, which encouraged the involvement of Chinese officials, including eunuchs, in illicit activities for personal gain.⁸ This explosive combination was intensified by the presence of foreign merchants – particularly Japanese and later Portuguese – who engaged in smuggling, which at times descended into piracy.

There were not only Japanese pirates but also Chinese. In fact, Kwan-wai So argues that Japanese constituted only 30–40 per cent of the brigands who assailed the Chinese coast.⁹ Collectively called *wokou*, they were kept largely under control during the Hongwu and Yongle periods. This was in part because of the maritime prohibition orders periodically issued from the throne, but also due to Chinese government presence on the high seas during the maritime expeditions. This presence acted largely as a deterrent, though sometimes pirates were directly apprehended.¹⁰ The prohibition orders were primarily directed at the private Chinese traders who engaged in illicit trade, smuggling and piracy. These orders forbade any Chinese sailors from going out into the ocean and engaging privately in commerce with foreigners.¹¹ Possessing ocean-going ships was also banned, and any such ships had to be modified by squaring off their prows to make them unsuitable for long-distance sailing.¹² From 1500 onwards it was a capital offence to have a ship with more than two masts.¹³ At one point it was declared that those who sailed out in the morning (ostensibly for fishing) had to come back the same day.¹⁴ The Chinese government also appealed to Japan by diplomatic means to curb the pirate activity, although this was ineffectual.¹⁵ Immediately after the expeditions were terminated, there was a slight resurgence in pirate activity and illicit trade,¹⁶ but from about 1466 to 1515, China's shores were relatively free from trouble. Lo Jung-pang attributes this temporary peace to the civil wars in Japan during this time after the unity of the Ashikaga Shogunate, established upon the conclusion of the Wars of the Northern and Southern Courts in 1392, had begun to break down.¹⁷ During the Ashikaga era, from the reign of the Chinese emperor Jianwen (r. 1399–1402) on, Japan had acknowledged China's suzerainty, and had been trading legally through the tribute system.¹⁸

This period of quiet along Chinese shores during these years created a false sense of security; there seemed little need for naval preparedness. With the lack of government investment, few new ships were built, existing ships were not repaired, and they rotted in the harbours.¹⁹ Despite the repeated prohibitions issued by the government against private trade, this trade grew steadily, and private shipbuilding flourished.²⁰ After 1515, the pirates became active again and the problem escalated dramatically. Japanese politics contributed to this development as well. As a result of the Onin Wars (1467–1477)

influential feudal families on the coast of Japan had become powerful and began to compete for domination of the Chinese tributary trade, which gradually slipped out of the shogunate's control.²¹ Reluctant to blame the Japanese entirely for the piracy of this period, Kwan-wai So nevertheless presents evidence showing an increase in Japanese pirate activity along the Chinese coast, and throughout the South China sea, even as far south as Bali, during the Eisho and Taiei periods (1504–1527).²²

Without adequate naval preparations, China was unable to defend her coastal cities. She therefore strengthened her shoreline defences, and the government finally turned its attentions back toward shipbuilding. In an important move to upgrade the Longjiang Shipyard, a branch office of the Ministry of Works was established in the yard in 1518, and a designated official was appointed as Secretary (*zhu shi*) to work on site and oversee its operations full time. The yard had previously been run on a part-time basis from the main office of that Ministry in the centre of the city. Li Zhaoxiang, the author of this *Treatise*, was the ninth official to occupy this post. The corruption and laxity that was rampant in the rest of the empire had seeped into the workings of the shipyard over the years. Seeing the problems and recording them in the *Treatise*, Li set out to increase the efficiency of the shipyard and produce high-quality ships.

RELATIONSHIP OF THE LONGJIANG SHIPYARD TO THE TREASURE FLEET

The information provided in the *Treatise* also sheds light on another interesting question. One cannot write about the Longjiang Shipyard without a consciousness of its close proximity in space and time to the Treasure Shipyard, where the ships for Zheng He's expeditions were built. Because of the proximity of the two shipyards, and the fact that they operated side by side for a period of time, scholars often look to the *Treatise* for answers to questions about Zheng He's ships. One of the questions that has preoccupied researchers is whether Zheng He's ships could have been the size reported in the *Ming shi*: 44 *zhang* long and 18 *zhang* wide, or roughly 450 ft (137 m) by 183 ft (56 m).²³ Many scholars are sceptical about this size, although we lack sufficient evidence to be certain precisely how large they were.²⁴ This is one area where the *Longjiang Shipyard Treatise* may be able to help. The treasure ships were described as 2,000-*liao* and 1,500-*liao* in the inscription on the Jinghai temple stele in Nanjing, and this inscription has more credence than the *Ming shi*, which is in essence a secondary source

compiled 250–300 years after the expeditions.²⁵ Sometimes thought to have been a unit of volume, capacity, or deadweight, the *liao* has not been well understood in the past. At one time it may have been used to calculate the amount of material used to build a ship, such as wood, iron nails, Chinese *tong* oil, and lime.²⁶ The *Longjiang Shipyard Treatise* not only refers to seven of its ship types by their size in *liao*, but also uses *liao* to specify the sizes of several other types. Because the linear dimensions of these ships are also provided in the *Treatise*, it may be possible to correlate these dimensions with the *liao*, to gain a clearer understanding of what this unit means.

THE CONTENTS OF THE TREATISE

This section outlines the contents of the *Treatise* as a whole to show its structure and the way in which chapters 2 and 7 fit within it. The work consists of eight chapters, which systematically cover almost all aspects of the shipyard:

- Chapter 1, entitled “Official Regulations” (*Xundian zhi*), includes imperial edicts, official rules and regulations, records of ministerial decisions, and instructions for the production of ships.
- Chapter 2, “Ships and Oars” (*Zhouji zhi*), provides an inventory of all the ships stationed in Nanjing and its vicinity. As noted above, it includes diagrams and descriptions of the various parts of the ships, as well as illustrations and other information about the over 20 ship types that were constructed at the shipyard.
- Chapter 3, entitled “Bureaucratic Governance” (*Guansi zhi*), lists the names and biographical details of the officials and administrators who served as secretaries and in other high positions in the bureaucracy of the shipyard from its founding in the Hongwu period until 1553. It also describes the various classifications of shipyard workers and their duties.
- Chapter 4 concerns “The Shipyard Site” (*Jianzhi zhi*). It gives the history of the site and describes it in detail. There are two wood-cut site-plans, one of the site in general and the other a close-up of a cluster of administrative buildings, the Branch Office of the Ministry of Works (*gongbu fensi*).²⁷
- Chapter 5, “Finances” (*Liancai zhi*), provides information about the economics of the shipyard. Hemp and *tong* oil were used for

shipbuilding in large quantities, and were produced on site in a tenant farmer arrangement. The chapter also contains information on the prices of various types of wood, a calculation table for pricing sawn wood, and a list of so-called “miscellaneous materials” (*zhaliao*) for shipbuilding.

- Chapter 6, “Building Trust and Eradicating Corruption” (*Fuge zhi*), describes the corrupt practices and inefficiencies that were rampant in the shipyard at the time when the *Treatise* was written.²⁸ The author also proposes measures to deal with them. It is therefore a rich source of information about the social and economic problems besetting the shipyard, as well as about management strategies that tended to be employed at the time.
- Chapter 7, “A Thorough Investigation into Labour and Materials” (*Kaozhong zhi*, literally, “Investigating and Measuring”), will be discussed in detail below. It contains extensive lists of the amounts of labour and materials required to build each model of ship.
- Chapter 8, “Ships in Literary and Historical Sources” (*Wenxian zhi*), is an anthology of references to ships in Chinese literary and historical sources, arranged in chronological order. This chapter is translated in full into German in the dissertation by Hans Lothar Scheuring, published in 1987 as *Die Drachenfluß-Werft von Nanking: Das Lung-chiang ch’uan-ch’ang chih, eine Ming-zeitliche Quelle zur Geschichte des chinesischen Schiffbaus*.²⁹

At the beginning of the *Treatise* the author explains how he sees the various parts of the work fitting together. Each part raises a particular question, for which the next provides the answer, as follows:

The “Official Regulations” chapter comes first . . . to honour the imperial commands and government regulations, which come from on high and must be carried out. [It raises the question:] What do these regulations concern? Therefore, I followed it with the chapter on “Ships and Oars” . . . [which raises the question:] Who takes care of managing the shipbuilding? Therefore I followed it with the chapter on the “Officials and Managers” . . . Where do these staff members engage in their work, and what do they do? Thus I describe [every aspect of the “Shipyard Site”] . . . Activating resources requires money, so I wrote the chapter on “Finances” . . . recording everything required by the shipyard. When wealth accumulates, corruption arises. Therefore I followed this with a chapter on “Building Trust and Eradicating Corruption” . . . However, if corruption is not fully eradicated, there will be a loss of equilibrium. Therefore I followed this with “A Thorough Investigation into Labour and Materials” . . . When these seven chapters were finished, I felt that . . . [the work was not yet complete], so I added the “Records of Ships Throughout History” (*wenxian*) as the final chapter.³⁰

Thus in the author's view, each chapter in the work has a part to play, and all the chapters interrelate with each other to form a coherent whole. Li says, "all the sections [of the book] are integrated with each other (literally, "belong to each other") and are presented in a logical order" (*gang mu xiang shu, xian hou you lun*).³¹ With regard to the two chapters examined in detail below, the author sees Chapter 2 as providing information on the ships themselves, and Chapter 7 as giving information on the labour and materials, which he states is motivated by a desire to conserve them and thereby combat corruption.

CHAPTER 2: SHIP PARTS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

The second chapter introduces the various models or types of ship that were produced in the shipyard. It has three main sections: "Inventory of Ships" (*zhi'e*), "Vessel Parts" (*qishu*), and "Illustrations" (*tushi*). The last section is most relevant for this discussion because, in addition to the illustrations, it also specifies the sizes of the various models, discusses the size of the foot measure used in the shipyard, and lists the thicknesses of the bottom planks for a number of models.

At the beginning of the Illustrations section are two wood-cuts labelling the parts of a ship. The names of these parts and their functions constitute a complex topic in itself, which will not be covered here. The first illustration gives the view of a generic ship from above, and the second shows a side view. The discussion of the size of the foot measure appears in the register at the top of the first illustration. It is translated below in the discussion of measurement units.

The register at the top of the second illustration lists the thicknesses of the bottom planks for a large number (but not all) of the ship types. This information is presented below in [Table 2.1](#).

These two illustrations of ship-parts depict generic ships rather than representing any particular model. They are followed by a series of wood-cuts showing individual ship types manufactured at the shipyard. Twenty-four ship types are treated in this chapter, and there are illustrations for each one. Dimensions are provided in the upper register of the illustration for most of the ship types, and the illustrations are usually followed by a textual description and/or discussion of the type and its history. [Figure 2.3](#) is an example of one of these illustrations, showing the Imperial Readiness Ship with the dimensions in the upper register.

A complete list of all the ship types treated in Chapter 2 is provided

below. The last three are marked “discontinued” (*yi fei*), meaning that these models were no longer manufactured at the yard when the *Treatise* was written.

- 1 Large Imperial Readiness Ship (*Yubei dahuang chuan*)
- 2 Large Yellow [i.e. Imperial] Ship (*Dahuang chuan*)
- 3 Small Yellow [i.e. Imperial] Ship (*Xiaohuang chuan*)

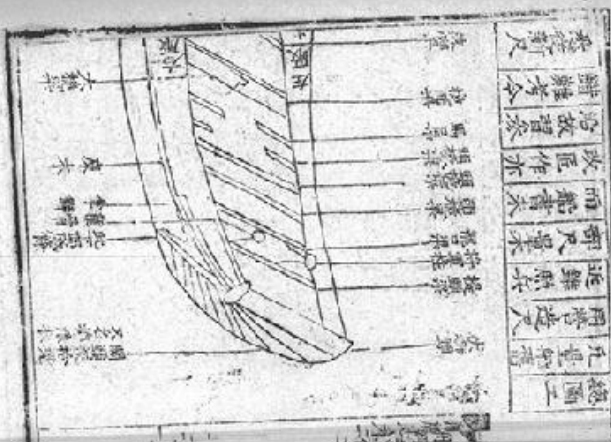
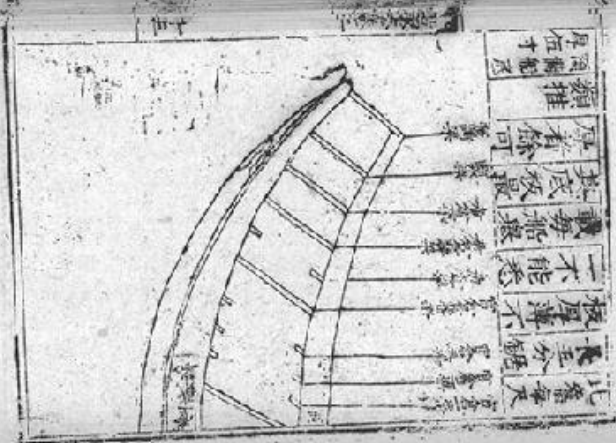


Figure 2.1 Woodcut of a ship viewed from above, with ship-parts labelled

預備大黃船

船面自頭至稍七丈玖尺叁寸

船底自頭至無板

處伍丈貳尺肆寸

無板處稍貳丈貳

寸

頭闊玖尺深伍尺

肆寸

中闊壹丈伍尺深

陸尺貳寸

稍闊壹丈肆寸深

柒尺貳寸

船牌志卷二

伏獅左右各長天五十

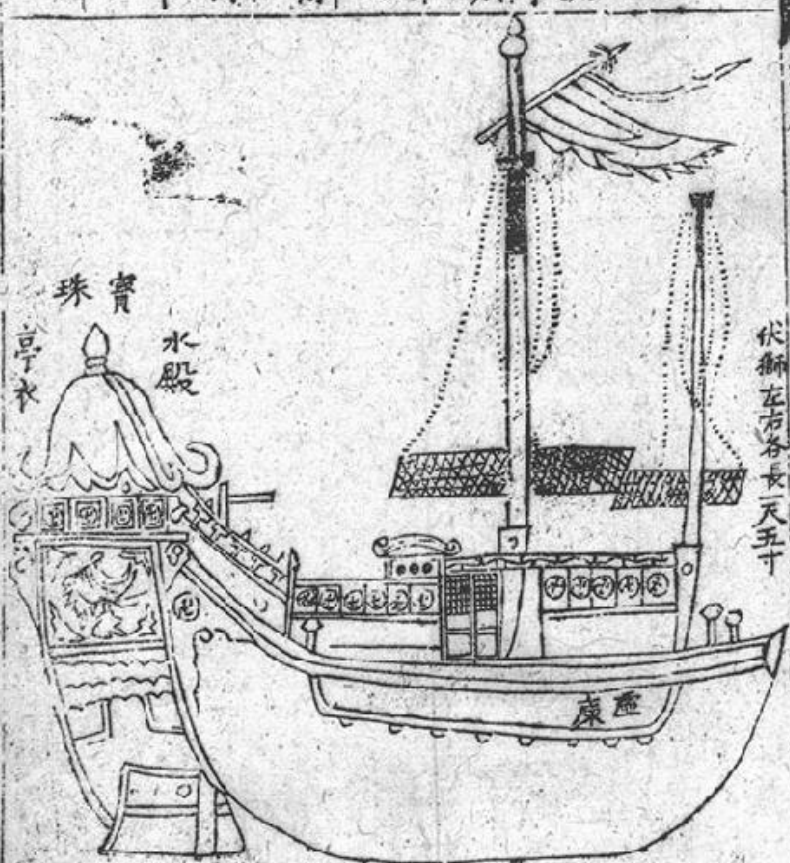


Figure 2.3 Illustration of the Imperial Readiness Ship

4 400-liao Combat Transport ship (*Si bai liao zhan zuo chuan*)

5 200-liao Combat Transport ship (*Er bai liao zhan zuo chuan*)

- 6 150-*liao* Combat Transport ship (*Yi bai wu shi liao zhan zuo chuan*)
- 7 100-*liao* Combat Transport ship (*Yi bai liao zhan zuo chuan*)
- 8 Sampan (*Sanban chuan*)
- 9 Pontoon ship (*Fuqiao chuan*)
- 10 400-*liao* Patrol ship (*Si bai liao xun zuo chuan*)
- 11 200-*liao* Single Seal Patrol ship (*Er bai liao yi ke yin xun chuan*)
- 12 200-*liao* Patrol Sand ship (*Er bai liao xun sha chuan*)
- 13 Jiujiang Style Warning ship (*Jiujiang shi shao chuan*)
- 14 Anqing Style Warning ship (*Anqing shi shao chuan*)
- 15 Light Shallow Manoeuvrable ship (*Qing qian li bian chuan*)
- 16 Jinshui River Fishing ship (*Jinshui he yu chuan*)
- 17 Houhu No. 1 Tower ship (*Hou hu yi hao lou chuan*)
- 18 Houhu No. 2 Tower ship (*Hou hu er hao lou chuan*)
- 19 Houhu Flat-bottomed ship (*Hou hu ping chuan*)
- 20 Produce-levy ship (*Choufen zuo chuan*)
- 21 Swift ship (*Kuai chuan*)
- 22 Centipede ship (*Wugong chuan*) (discontinued)
- 23 Ocean-going ship (*Hai chuan*) (discontinued)
- 24 Double-prow ship (*Liang tou chuan*) (discontinued)

The term “Houhu” refers to Xuanwu hu, or Xuanwu lake, in Nanjing. Jiujiang, Anqing, and Jinshui are all place names.³² *Choufen* is the Chinese term for “produce levies,” or taxes collected on produce, such as fish and wood.³³ The *Choufen zuo chuan* was a ship built specifically to collect these levies; hence it is called the “Produce-levy ship” here. The seven ship types with the number of *liao* in their names can easily be identified in this list.

The dimensions are given in unusual detail, with nine measurements for each ship: three each for the length, beam, and depth. The length measurements are specified first, beginning with the overall length at deck level, then the length at the bottom of the ship from the bow to the rudder opening, and finally the length from the rudder opening to the stern of the ship. The beam measurements are given for bow, stern, and amidships. Depth measurements are provided for the same three parts of the ship. [Table 2.1](#) below shows the dimensions given in Chapter 2 for all twenty-four ship types built at the Longjiang Shipyard; the last column on the right is the length-to-beam ratio:

The dimensions in the *Treatise* are given in the standard Chinese units of length: *zhang*, *chi*, and *cun*. These have been converted to Chinese feet (*chi*) in [Table 2.1](#) for the reader's convenience. Thus the length of the first ship in the list, the Imperial Readiness Ship, is given as 7 *zhang* 9 *chi* 3 *cun* in the text, but is converted here to 79.3 *chi*. Because 1 *zhang* is equal to 10 *chi*, and 1 *chi* to 10 *cun*, they are easy to convert into decimals. According to the government standard set by the Ministry of Works, one *zhang* was equal to approximately 3.11 m, or 10.2 ft in Ming times.³⁵ The *chi* (31.1 cm) was thus slightly longer than the English foot (1.02 ft), and the *cun* (3.11 cm) somewhat longer than the English inch (1.224 in). It should be kept in mind, however, that these equivalents are only estimates of the size of the foot that was actually used to build the ships. Although there was a government standard, it was not always followed. There tended to be local variations, and even variations according to industry or product. A simple parallel in English would be the “baker’s dozen.” The problems involved in determining the size of the units of length used in building Zheng He’s treasure ships have been discussed elsewhere.³⁶

[Table 2.1](#) Linear dimensions of 24 ship types in Chinese feet, *chi*.³⁴

Ship	Fore deck	Fore rudder gap	Fore rudder gap	Beam at bow	Beam amid ships	Beam stern	Depth at bow	Depth amid ships	Depth stern	LR
Large Imperial Readiness Ship	79.3	53.6	10.3	9	13	10.3	5.4	6.3	7.3	3.287
Large Imperial Ship	86.4	54.1	10.6	11.5	14.4	10.3	5.3	5.3	6.7	3.383
Small Imperial Ship	79.3	54.5	10.5	11.7	13	10.5	5.2	5.2	6.5	3.300
400- <i>hao</i> Combat Transport Ship	89.3	60.5	13.5	12.8	16.3	12.9	4.9	5.0	7.2	3.424
300- <i>hao</i> Combat Transport Ship	66.8	43.3	10.3	8.3	12.6	9.8	4.4	4.3	5.2	3.183
250- <i>hao</i> Combat Transport Ship	53	42	8.3	8.2	10.1	7.7	3.6	3.6	4.2	3.046
100- <i>hao</i> Combat Transport Ship	48.2	34.2	7.8	6.3	8.1	7.2	2.3	2.7	4	6.044
Sampan Ship	39.3	34.3	5	3.3	8.4	5.3	3.1	3.1	3.4	4.722
Pontoon Ship	63	63.5	6	12.5	13	12.5	4.4	4.6	5.1	4.133
400- <i>hao</i> Patrol Ship	88	63	11.3	12.5	13.6	11.7	5	5.3	6.3	3.641
200- <i>hao</i> Single Sea Patrol Ship	58.7	40.3	11	7.9	12	9.4	3.3	4	5.3	4.892
200- <i>hao</i> Patrol Sand Ship	61	40	11.6	7.3	12.3	9.4	4.1	4.2	5	4.939
Jiaoping Warning Ship	37	27.2	5.5	3.4	6.7	5	2.6	2.7	3.1	3.322
Anping Warning Ship	31	22	5.5	3.1	6.3	5.2	2.4	2.4	2.8	3.328
Light Shallow Manoeuvre Ship	56.3	35.6	10.5	8.4	12.3	7.7	3.1	3.4	4.3	3.600
Jinshui River Fishing Ship	22.3	17.3	3.75	2.7	4	2.7	1.3	1.5	1.4	3.375
Huahu No. 1 Tower Ship	35.3	35.3	7.7	7.4	11	8	2.5	2.6	3.3	4.391
Huahu No. 2 Tower Ship	41.8	29	3.8	6.75	8.4	6.4	2.5	2.2	2.4	4.326
Huahu Harboured Ship	39.2	35.8	7	6.1	7.1	6	2.3	2.3	2.6	3.321
Production Ship	73.7	81.3	10.3	12.0	13.6	12.4	4.2	4.7	6.8	4.833
Swift Ship										
Centipede Ship	82.3				16.3					3.000
Ocean going Ship										
Double-grow Ship										

In fact, Li Zhaoxiang discusses the difficulty of standardising the length of the foot-rule in a passage about the size of the foot measure used in the shipyard, which, as noted above, appears in the upper register of the first labelled illustration of ship-parts. Three different foot measures are referred to in this single passage alone, thus illustrating the confusion surrounding this issue:

In general, the old system for measuring ships was to use the “construction foot” (*yingzao chi*) [as a standard]. Although the “Ministry of War foot” (*bingbu chi*) is [now] used for measuring wood, the shipbuilding manuals (*chuan shu*) have not adapted to this change, and the carpentry workshops (*jiang zuo*) still follow the conventions that were used before. At present we use the “new foot” (*xin chi*), in everything we build. It is 5 *fen* (one half of one *cun* or inch) longer than the old one.³⁷

Such local variations and subtle changes show the difficulty of pinpointing exactly how long the foot was in any particular context in the absence of conclusive evidence.

The final item to be presented here from Chapter 2 is the list of the thicknesses of the bottom planks for the various ship models (Table 2.2).³⁸ As noted above, this list appears in the upper register of the second labelled illustration of ship-parts.

Such thicknesses are important for calculating the amount of materials used in construction, and for analysing the strength and seaworthiness of a ship.³⁹

Table 2.2 Thicknesses of bottom planks in a selection of ship types

<i>Ship</i>	<i>Thickness (cun)</i>
Imperial Readiness Ship	5
Large Imperial Ship	2.2
Small Imperial Ship	2.1
400- <i>liao</i> Combat Transport Ship (<i>zhanzuo chuan</i>)	2.8
200- <i>liao</i> Combat Ship (<i>zhanchuan</i>)	2.2
150- <i>liao</i> Combat Ship (<i>zhanchuan</i>)	1.6
100- <i>liao</i> Combat Ship (<i>zhanchuan</i>)	1.6
Light Shallow Manoeuvrable Ship	2
400- <i>liao</i> Patrol Ship	2.6
200- <i>liao</i> Sand Ship	1.9
Baida Pontoon Ship	2
Single Seal Patrol Ship	2
Warning Ship	1.5
Rowing Ship	1.5

In 1996, André Wegener Sleswyk attempted to correlate the linear dimensions of the ships portrayed in Chapter 2 with the *liao*, a unit sometimes used to express the size of ships. His ultimate goal was to extrapolate from this analysis the dimensions of Zheng He's ships, which are cited in the Jinghai temple stele inscription as 2,000- and 1,500-*liao* in size. As noted above, seven of the ships listed in the Longjiang Shipyard Treatise are called by their name in quantities of *liao*. Working on the assumption that the *liao* is a unit of capacity, he tried "to determine the variation of the *liao* with the dimensions."⁴⁰ Of these seven ships, two are 400-*liao*, three are 200-*liao*, one is 150-*liao* and one is 100-*liao*. The fact that 400 is twice 200, and 200 is twice 100, is convenient for his calculations. He arrived at the following formula:

$$liao = (L \times B \times H)^{2/3}$$

where L, B, and H are the length, beam, and height of a ship as given in the *Treatise*. These dimensions have to be expressed in *chi* for the formula to work. His results are presented in Table 2.3:

Table 2.3 Results of applying Sleswyk's formula to the seven ships named according to quantities of *liao*.

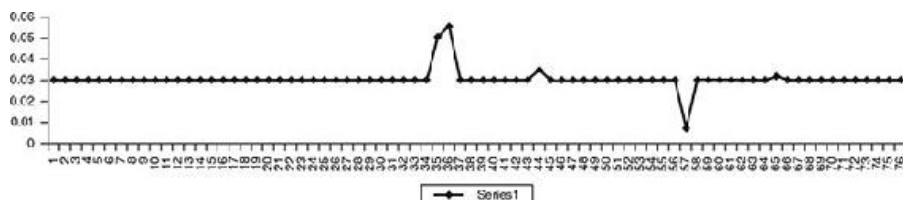
Ship	length at deck	width at amidships	depth at amidships	L x W x D (in chi)	cube root	to the 2/3 power
400- <i>liao</i> Combat Transport Ship	89.5	16.5	6.0	8860.500	20.69	428.07
200- <i>liao</i> Combat Transport Ship	60.8	12.6	4.5	3447.360	15.17	230.13
150- <i>liao</i> Combat Transport Ship	55.0	10.1	3.6	1999.800	12.60	158.76
100- <i>liao</i> Combat Transport Ship	49.2	8.1	3.7	1474.524	11.38	129.50
400- <i>liao</i> Patrol Transport Ship	88.0	15.6	5.2	7138.560	19.25	370.56
200- <i>liao</i> Single Seal Patrol Ship	58.7	12.0	4.0	2817.600	14.12	199.37
200- <i>liao</i> Patrol Sand Ship	61.0	12.3	4.2	3151.260	14.66	214.92

Because the figures in the last column on the right are quite close to the number of *liao* for each ship, Sleswyk concludes that his formula works, and that this is an accurate way to calculate the *liao* of a ship from the dimensions. Based on this formula, he calculates that Zheng He's 2,000-*liao* ships were 200 *chi* long, 36 *chi* wide and 12.5 *chi* high, and his 1,500-*liao* ships were 175 *chi* long, 30 *chi* wide and 11 *chi* high.⁴¹

Richard Barker, water engineer and maritime historian, has questioned the validity of Sleswyk's formula, arguing that its results may be "coincidental," and suggesting the that following formula be used instead:⁴²

$$liao = 0.11 \times [L \times B \times H] - 0.003 \times [L \times B \times H]^{4/3}$$

It is based on the equation [deadweight = displacement – lightweight]. However, Barker notes that there are still difficulties surrounding the definitions of the terms and the reliability of the data, and that no such derivation can be conclusive. The issue is beyond my technical competence, but it seems that efforts like these to come closer to the truth using the information contained in the *Treatise* are worthwhile. The data in the *Treatise* are quite extensive, and they are the best we have.



The *Treatise* is surprisingly precise on some matters. For example, when the labour costs per work-unit in *liang* of silver are calculated from the information in the labour table in Chapter 7, the figure of 0.03 *liang* of silver per work-unit is obtained for 62 out of 76 entries, or 81 per cent. For a further 11 entries, the figures are very close to 0.03, varying from between 0.029871 and 0.031343. One calculation yields a figure slightly higher than these, 0.034866. Only three showed a relatively large discrepancy: 0.050456, 0.05521, and 0.007169 *liang*. These results and discrepancies are shown in Figure 2.4 above.

Such anomalies in data can often be explained by printing errors or special circumstances. In fact, if the results were perfect, this might be cause for suspicion. The level of precision and consistency in this example gives the *Treatise* an air of authenticity and suggests that the other information it contains is the product of genuine efforts to record the truth.

CHAPTER 7: LABOUR AND MATERIALS

This is the longest and most detailed chapter in the *Treatise*. It includes two main sections: one entitled “Limiting Salaries” (*shao shi*), which gives the amounts and costs of labour for building the ships; and the other entitled “Budgeting Materials” (*liang cai*), which specifies the amounts of materials used for shipbuilding. These are essentially two lengthy tables, which together occupy 113 pages, or approximately 40 per cent of the entire *Treatise*. One reason why the tables are so long is because multiple sets of information are given for each ship type. Both the labour table and the materials table include information from two other shipbuilding manuals (referred to in the *Treatise*) for almost every ship type, as well as from examples of real ships. For most of the types, the labour table includes three examples of real ships (called “cases,” *an* 案 in the text; here they will be called “instances”), while the materials table includes just two examples. These instances are indicated by a date, which is probably the date when the ship was completed.

AMOUNTS AND COSTS OF LABOUR

The labour section comprises 32 pages in the modern edition of the *Treatise* (pp. 138–170). Each entry begins by giving the total amount of labour necessary to build the ship in question, according to one

particular source (either a named manual or an actual ship). The labour is calculated in numbers of work-units (*gong*), probably a work-day, and possibly as many as 12 hours long.⁴³ The total cost of the labour is also given, expressed in *liang* (taels) of silver. These total figures are followed by an extensive breakdown of the work involved in building the ship in question. The work is divided into individual tasks, with the number of work-units given for each task. Below is a facsimile copy of two pages from the *Xuanlantang* edition, listing the amounts of labour necessary to build the 400-*liao* Combat Transport Ship.

28, and 31 (1546, 1549, and 1552). There is also a column corresponding to a second manual, *Chuan shu*, but it contains no data for this particular ship. The most comprehensive list of tasks is that from the 1503 source, which is translated below (Table 2.4). In fact, the list for the Imperial Readiness Ship is the most comprehensive one of all the ships, perhaps because it was for the emperor's use: it must have had elegant fittings and extensive decorations.

Table 2.4 Tasks and numbers of work units required to build the Imperial Readiness Ship (1503)

<i>Task</i>	<i>Work units</i>
woodworking (<i>chuan mu zuo</i>)	780.0
sawing (<i>ju zuo</i>)	225.0
decoration or outfitting (<i>zhuang xiu zuo</i>)	310.0
carving bells (or carving and bells, <i>diao luan zuo</i>)	58.0
caulking (<i>nian zuo</i>)	74.0
ironwork (<i>tie zuo</i>)	300.0
installing iron (<i>shang tie zuo</i>)	43.5
sail-making (<i>peng zuo</i>)	130.0
rope-making (<i>suo zuo</i>)	27.5
installing rope (<i>shang suo zuo</i>)	91.5
cable work (<i>lan zuo</i>)	74.0
bamboo work (<i>zhu zuo</i>)	1.5
painting (<i>youqi zuo</i>)	29.5
colouring (<i>wumo zuo</i>)	20.5
decorating bells (<i>zhuang luan zuo</i>)	133.0
polishing metal (<i>mo jin zuo</i>)	32.5
flag-making (<i>qi zuo</i>)	8.0
drum-making (<i>gu zuo</i>)	4.0
clam shell-working (to make lime for caulking, <i>li ke zuo</i>)	6.0
tassels and ornamental fringe making (<i>ying zuo</i>)	6.0
windlass work (<i>xuan zuo</i>)	23.5
dyeing (<i>ran zuo</i>)	2.5
sewing (<i>caifeng zuo</i>)	5.0
tin-working (<i>baixi zuo</i>)	103.0
two-stranded line making (<i>shuangxian zuo</i>)	9.5
ribbon work or flat silk cord (<i>tiao zuo</i>)	1.5
installing seats (<i>chuanyi zuo</i>)	2.0
barrel-working (<i>tong zuo</i>)	4.0
copper working (<i>tong zuo</i>)	6.0
high-quality copper working (<i>xiang tong zuo</i>)	12.5
smelting and casting (<i>zhu zuo</i>)	21.5

Some of the work-tasks are clear and predictable, but others are puzzling, such as “carving” (which does not specify what is carved) and “decorating bells.” Those that are not yet thoroughly understood have been translated literally, in the hope that their meaning will become clear later. For the above example, the total number of work units is 2,558.5, and the total labour cost is 76 *liang* 7 *qian* 8 *fen* 5 *li*, or 76.785 *liang*.

Because of its extravagant decorations and attention to detail, the Imperial Readiness Ship is not a typical ship. Therefore, I have also provided a translation of the tasks and numbers of work units for the 400-*liao* Combat Transport Ship (Table 2.5), which is more representative of the vessels usually built at the shipyard. Ships like this would have been used for practical purposes such as transport, combat, warning and patrol. The data about this ship are also taken from the 1503 shipbuilding manual. The total number of work units is 2,487.1 and the cost is 74 *liang* 6 *qian* 1 *fen* (74.61 *liang*):

Table 2.5 Tasks and numbers of work units required to build a 400-*liao* Combat Transport Ship (1503)

<i>Task</i>	<i>Work units</i>
woodworking	850.0
sawing	250.0
decoration or outfitting	365.0
carving bells (or carving and bells)	79.0
sawing	40.0
caulking	343.6
ironwork	195.5
installing iron	17.0
sail-making	89.0
rope making	62.5
cable work	18.5
painting	66.5
colouring	30.0

Table 2.5 (continued)

Task	Work units
flag-making	9.5
drum-making	5.0
clam shell working	47.0
tassels and ornamental fringe making	2.0
windlass work	5.0
dyeing	4.0
tin-working	3.0
two-stranded line making	6.0

Some of the tasks or jobs (*zuo*) were probably performed in specialised workshops (*zuofang*). We know from the site plans provided in Chapter 4, and from descriptions of the site, that there were workshops for such activities as caulking (*nian zuofang*), iron-working (*tie zuofang*), sail-making (*peng zuofang*),⁴⁵ fine-woodworking (*xi mu zuofang*), and painting (*youqi zuofang*). One of the two site plans in Chapter 4 is reproduced below, showing the location of three of these workshops on the site.

In both the labour and the materials tables, the information is slightly different in different sources for the same ship type. However, it falls within quite a narrow range. For instance, the total number of work units and labour costs for the Imperial Readiness Ship are given in four different sources in Table 2.6:

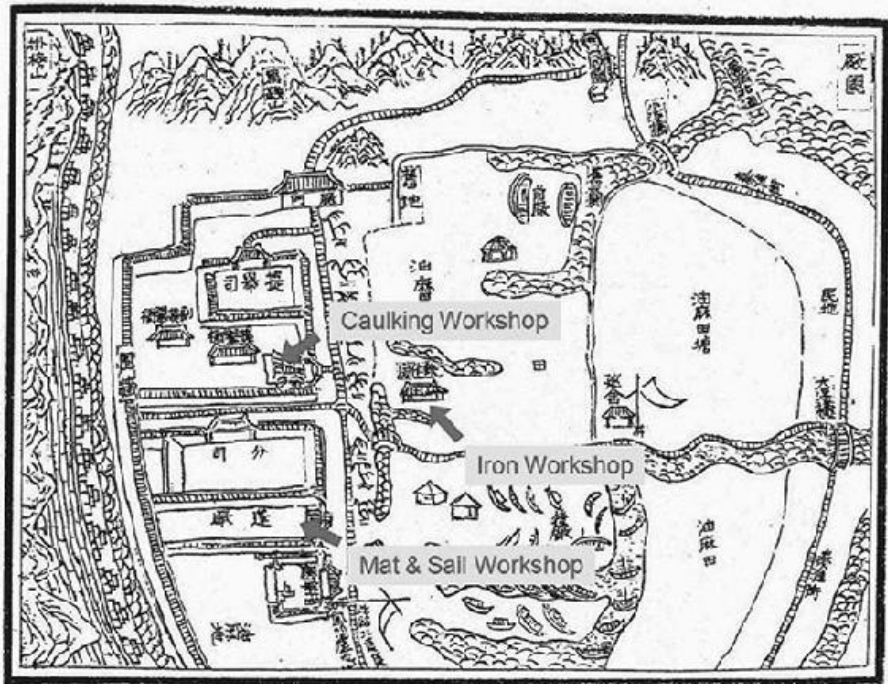


Figure 2.6 Site map from Chapter 2 indicating three of the workshops

Table 2.6 Total work units and costs to build the three instances of the Imperial Readiness Ship

Chinese date	Western date	Liao	Total work units	Total cost (liang)
Hongzhi 16 (manual)	1503		2,558.5	76.785
Jiajing 25 (example)	1546	400	2,473.7	74.211
Jiajing 28 (example)	1549	400	2,509.0	75.270
Jiajing 31 (example)	1552	300	2,427.5	72.825

In the example in [Table 2.6](#), the three instances of the ship were all built more economically in time and cost than prescribed in the 1503 manual. The slight discrepancies in the results for the different instances of the ship suggest that the data is authentic – it is probably the case that no two ships were exactly alike. The inclusion of so many sources of information, all slightly different, indicates a level of sophistication in the approach to the data, and the use of both manuals and real examples suggests an understanding of the difference between prescribed and actual amounts.

With so many sets of information for each ship type, it is difficult to create a simple table showing the number of work units and labour costs

for each type. To do this, one would have to choose to use information from one source alone, take an average of the information provided in all the sources, or present all the various sets of information in a single table. Choosing one written source would be difficult because no single source is used for all the ship types. Taking an average runs the risk of distorting the original. Presenting all the information in a single table would create a table that would be too long and confusing for the current chapter. However, instead of using a written source, the first example could be used for all the models. It would have to be remembered that dates are different for each. Moreover, in each example of a ship, the data are from an individual manifestation of a prescribed model. Therefore they probably differ not only from the prescribed model, but also from other instances of that model, in undetermined ways. The ships used as examples of various models were for the most part completed in different years, and their year of completion may have affected the number of work units and/or cost. With these reservations in mind, the labour amounts and cost data from the first example of all the ships is given in [Table 2.7](#). (Because there is one figure provided for the 100,000ths place in the cost column, I have written them all with five decimal places.)

As mentioned above, sometimes there is no entry for a particular ship type in a specific source.

Presumably, all the information about the instances of ship types was tallied as each was being built and recorded in some kind of record book before they were reproduced in the *Treatise* by Li Zhaoxiang. It must have been the normal procedure to record this information long before Li took charge of the shipyard, because most of the ships that are listed date from before Jiajing 30 (1551), when he took office.

[Table 2.7](#) Work units and labour costs, based on information supplied for the first example of each ship type in Chapter 7

Type of ship	Work units	Cost in liang (decimals)
Imperial Readiness Ship (Jiajing 25, 1546, 400 <i>liao</i>)	2,473.70	74.21100
Nanjing Large Imperial Ship (Jiajing 27, 1548, over 400 <i>liao</i>)	927.80	27.83400
Nanjing Small Imperial Ship (Jiajing 23, 1544, 200 <i>liao</i>)	917.00	27.51000
400- <i>liao</i> Combat Transport Ship (Jiajing 17, 1538)	2,471.00	74.13000
200- <i>liao</i> Combat Transport Ship (Jiajing 18, 1539)	929.00	27.87000
150- <i>liao</i> Combat Transport Ship (Jiajing 15, 1536)	699.00	20.99000
100- <i>liao</i> Combat Transport (Jiajing 21, 1542)	448.00	13.44000
Sampan Ship (Jiajing 15, 1536)	230.00	6.90000
Rowing Ship (Jiajing 16, 1537)	241.00	7.23000
400- <i>liao</i> Troop Ship (Jiajing 3, 1524)	1,400.00	42.00000
200- <i>liao</i> Patrol Ship (Jiajing 15, 1536)	624.50	18.73500
200- <i>liao</i> Sand Ship (Jiajing 15, 153)	771.50	23.14500
Anqing Guardship (Jiajing 10, 1531)	220.00	6.60000
Jiujiang Guardship (Jiajing 5, 1526)	232.00	6.96000
Light Shallow Convenient Ship (Jiajing 13, 1534)	898.00	26.94000
Tower Ship No. 1 (Jiajing 11, 1532)	599.00	17.97000
Tower Ship No. 2 (Jiajing 11, 1532)	421.00	12.63000
Flat-bottomed Ship (Jiajing 11, 1532)	145.50	4.36500
400- <i>liao</i> Pontoon Ship (Jiajing 5, 1521)	666.67	20.00001
Produce-levy Ship (Jiajing 23, 1544)	806.00	24.18000
Jinshui fishing ship (Jiajing 11, 1532)	84.00	2.52000

Although we know the number of *liao* for the seven ship types primarily from their names, the labour table gives the number of *liao* for several additional ship types. Both the Imperial Readiness Ship and the Nanjing Large Imperial Ship came in two sizes: 300- and 400-*liao*. The table also says that the Small Imperial Ship was less than 200 *liao*. It also classifies the ships into four categories, which are not used systematically elsewhere in the *Treatise*: Imperial Ships, Combat Ships, Patrol Ships, and Lake Ships.

AMOUNTS AND COSTS OF MATERIALS

The section on the materials used to build the ships is even longer than the labour section, occupying 80 pages (pp. 170–250) in the modern edition. It provides information on 23 ship types. As mentioned above, there are four possible sources of information for each type: two written sources and two instances of real ships. The first written source is *Chuan*

ji, which probably refers to *Nan chuan ji*, a work by Shen Qi.⁴⁶ This work predates the *Longjiang Shipyard Treatise* but is less comprehensive. The second is *Chuan shu*, probably the same work by that name referred to in the labour table. The instances of real ships are indicated by their date, as in the labour table. The materials are divided into the following categories: wood, decoration, carving, caulking, ironwork, installation of ironwork, sails, large ropes, installation of large ropes, cable, bamboo, painting and varnishing, colouring, decorating bells, gilding, flags, drums, clam shells,⁴⁷ tassels, windlasses, dyeing, sewing, tin, double string or cord, silk washing, installation of seats, barrels, copper work, and metal casting.⁴⁸ Below is a facsimile copy of two pages from the list of materials necessary to build the 100-*liao* Combat Ship.

become clearer as the research progresses. The materials are grouped into categories, and the categories, which are in larger sized characters in the *Xuanlantang* edition, are presented here in bold-face type.

Again, because this ship is for imperial use, it is more elegant and elaborate than most of the other ships produced at the shipyard. This is therefore the most comprehensive list in the materials table. The lists for the more typical ships are considerably shorter. In the interest of keeping the size of this chapter to a minimum, however, lists of materials for other ships are not presented here.

Table 2.8 List of materials and quantities needed for the Imperial Readiness Ship (according to *Chuan ji*)

<i>Item</i>	<i>Quantity</i>
Wood	
Single planks of <i>Phoebe</i> spp. (<i>nanmu</i>)	1,515 zhang 1 chi 3 cun danban)
Sichuan fir single lengths with two three parallel connection rods together, all single planks (<i>chuan shan mubing lianer fang lia er fang gong danban</i>)	577 zhang 5 chi 5 cun
Sichuan fir logs used for the main masts (<i>tou da wei yong chuan shan mu</i>)	2
Fir for making ten oars (<i>lu shi zhang yong shanmu</i>)	5 logs
Medium-sized fir poles for flagpole (<i>shao zhao gan yong zhong shan tiao</i>)	3 poles
Fir poles for sail weigh beam (<i>cheng gang yong shan tiao</i>)	4 poles
Miscellaneous lengths of wood for sump (<i>shui qiang yong za mu</i>)	2
Lengths of elm for rudder-post (<i>duogan yong yumu</i>)	1
Sandalwood logs for rudder-blade and tiller (<i>duoya, guanmen bang</i>)	2
Hammer handle (<i>shui jue lang tou</i>)	Made of recycled material (<i>yong jiu liao gai yong</i>)

Decoration and carving (two tasks)

Sichuan fir single lengths with two 0366 *zhang* 6 *chi* 8 *cun*
three parallel connection rods

(*chuan shan mu bing lian er fang*
lian er fang gong danban)

Single planks of *Phoebe* spp. (*nanmu* 5 *zhang* 7 *chi* 6 *cun* 6 *fen*
danban)

Elm rod for attaching seats (*lian yi* 1
yong yu mu)

Fish glue (*yuxian jiao*) 1 *jin*⁴⁹

Caulking (*nian zuo*)

Chinese wood oil (*tong you*) 800 *jin*

White hemp (*bai ma*) 650 *jin*

Lime (*shi hui*) 1600 *jin*

Ironwork (*tie zuo*)

Wrought iron (*shutie*), coal (*meitan*)

Installation of ironwork (*shang tie* *zuo*)

Wrought iron, coal (*shutie*, *meitan*)

Sails

Qinggui bamboo (*qinggui zhu*) 700

Mao bamboo (*mao zhu*) 4

Palm coir or fibres (*zong mao*) 170 *jin*

Yellow rattan (*huangteng*) 100 pieces

Leaves of broad-leaved bamboo (*ruo* 120 *jin*
ye)

Large ropes (*suo zuo*)

Palm coir or fibres (*zong mao*) 800 *jin*

White hemp (*bai ma*) 450 *jin*

Installation of large ropes (*shang suo* *zuo*)

White hemp (*bai ma*) 40 *jin*

Cable (*lan zuo*)

Qingshui bamboo (*qingshui zhu*) 1700

Bamboo

Qinggui bamboo 150

Mao bamboo 3.5

Painting and Varnishing (*you qi zuo*)

Chinese wood oil (*tong you*) 100 *jin*

Yellow dye (*shi huang*) 30 *jin*

White flour (*bai mian*) 6 *jin* 8 *liang*

Medium white cotton (*zhong bai*
mian) 5 *liang*

Second cinnabar (*er zhu*) 8 *jin*

Earth (<i>tuzi</i>)	3 <i>sheng</i> 升
Tile ash (<i>wahui</i>)	1 <i>dou</i> 斗 8 <i>sheng</i>
Raw lacquer (<i>sheng qi</i>)	40 <i>jin</i>
Water flower cinnabar (<i>shui hua zhu</i>)	1 <i>jin</i> 4 <i>liang</i>
Lithargyrum (<i>mi tuo seng</i>)	6 <i>liang</i>
Black (literally “ink”) coal (<i>mo mei</i>)	50 <i>jin</i>
Water glue (<i>shui jiao</i>)	6 <i>jin</i>
Silver cinnabar (<i>yin zhu</i>)	5 <i>jin</i>
Red earth (<i>hong tu</i>)	5 <i>jin</i>
Bright powder (<i>guang fen</i>)	20 <i>jin</i>
Foreign cinnabar (<i>fan zhu</i>)	2 <i>jin</i>
Point lacquer (<i>dian qi</i>)	2 <i>jin</i>
Yellow cinnabar (<i>huang dan</i>)	2 <i>jin</i> 4 <i>liang</i>
Balm (<i>xiang you</i>)	4 <i>jin</i>
Ramie cloth (<i>zhu bu</i>)	1 <i>pi</i> (1 <i>pi</i> = 4 <i>zhang</i>) 51 1 <i>zhang</i> 8 <i>chi</i>
Colouring (<i>wu mo zuo</i>)	
Silver cinnabar (<i>yin zhu</i>)	2 <i>jin</i>
Second cinnabar (<i>er zhu</i>)	2 <i>jin</i>
Bright powder (<i>huang fen</i>)	3 <i>jin</i>
Black coal (<i>mo mei</i>)	52 1 <i>jin</i> 4 <i>liang</i>
Water glue (<i>shui jiao</i>)	3 <i>jin</i>
Three malachite (<i>san lu</i>)	2 <i>jin</i> 8 <i>liang</i>
He malachite (<i>he lu</i>)	1 <i>jin</i> 12 <i>liang</i>
Gamboge (<i>teng huang</i>)	2 <i>liang</i>
Branch malachite (<i>zhi tiao lu</i>)	3 <i>jin</i>
Indigotin dye (<i>dian hua qing</i>)	5 <i>liang</i>
Decorating bells (<i>zhuang luan zuo</i>)	
Gold foil (<i>jin bo</i>)	60 pieces
Ramie cloth (<i>zhu bu</i>)	5 <i>chi</i>
Processed lacquer (<i>shu qi</i>)	Wrought lacquer: 12 <i>liang</i> 5 <i>qian</i>
Raw lacquer (<i>sheng qi</i>)	2 <i>liang</i> 5 <i>qian</i>
Gilding (<i>mo jin zuo</i>)	
Gold foil (<i>jin bo</i>)	2 <i>liang</i> 5 <i>qian</i>
Flags (<i>qi zuo</i>)	
Yellow raw official thin silk (<i>huang sheng guan juan</i>)	8 bolts (<i>pi</i>)
Yellow silk thread (<i>huang si xian</i>)	2 <i>liang</i>
Drums (<i>gu zuo</i>)	
Water buffalo hide (<i>sheng xue shui niu</i>)	5 <i>pi</i>
Camphor wood (<i>zhang mu</i>)	1 length
Clam shells (<i>li ke zuo</i>)	
Clam shells (<i>li ke</i>)	60 <i>jin</i>
Tassels (<i>ying zuo</i>)	

Red torch tassel (*qian hong huo ba* 2 *jìn*
ying)

Windlasses (*xuan zuo*)

White poplar (*bai yang mu*) 1 length

Sandalwood (*tan mu*) 1 length

White *ku* bamboo (*bai ku zhu*) 2

Dyeing (*ran zuo*)

Indigotin (*dian qing*) 92 *jìn*

Alum (*ming fan*) 1 *jìn*

Sapanwood (*su mu*) 6 *liang*

Flower of Japanese pagoda tree 3 *jìn*

(*Sophora japonica*, *huai hua*)

Pig pancreas (*zhu yi zi*, perhaps for 1 *jìn*
soap)⁵³

Chan jar ash (*chan gang hui*) 62 *jìn*

Sewing (*cai feng zuo*)

White wide cotton cloth (*kuo bai* 18 *pi*
mian bu)

Green (or black) silk thread (*qing si* 4 *liang*
xian)

Tin (*bai xi zuo*)

Flower tin (*hua xi*) 8 *liang*

Lard (*zhu you*) 8 *liang*

Double string or cord (*shuang xian*
zuo)

Raw water buffalo skin (*sheng zheng* 8 pieces
shui niu pi)

Red corium (*hong zhen pi*) 3 pieces

Raw left silk thread (*sheng si zuo* 6 *qian*
xian)

Silk washing (*di zuo*)

Red boiled-off silk thread (*da hong* 8 *liang* 5 *qian*
xian)

Green silk thread (*lü si xian*) 3 *qian*

Crimson cloth with soft nap, flannel 5 *liang*
(*hong rong*)

Installation of seats (*chuan yi zuo*)

Black cotton yarn (*qing mian sha*) 2 *jìn* 8 *liang*

Barrels (*tong zuo*) Made from recycled materials (*yong*
ben chuan jiu liao)

Copper work and *xiang* copper (*tong*
zuo, *xiang tong zuo*)

Wrought brass (*huang shu tong*) 16 *jìn*

Xiang copper (*xiang tong*) 15 *jìn*

Charcoal (<i>mu tan</i>)	16 <i>jin</i>
Borax (<i>peng sha</i>)	15 <i>jin</i>
Metal casting (<i>zhu zuo</i>)	
Red copper (<i>hong tong</i>)	5 <i>jin</i>
Pig iron (<i>sheng tie</i>)	119 <i>jin</i>
Rice husks (<i>dao pi</i>)	119 <i>jin</i>
Ears of wheat (<i>mai sui</i>)	119 <i>jin</i>
Charcoal (<i>mu tan</i>)	119 <i>jin</i>
Coal (<i>meitan</i>)	119 <i>jin</i>

A comprehensive table showing all the materials for all the ship types has not yet been attempted. This would be a complex task, partly because the materials are named and grouped together differently in some of the entries, but also because there are several lists of materials for each ship type. As with the labour table, some of the sources lack information on particular ships. It is odd that the lists of materials are provided for 23 ship-types, whereas 24 ship-types are covered in the illustration section of Chapter 2, and 21 are treated in the labour section of Chapter 7. There also seem to be slightly different sets of ships in the various lists, although in most cases there is only a slight difference in name.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, the *Treatise* is a uniquely detailed repository of information about ships and shipbuilding in the Ming period. It shows that careful records were being kept at the Longjiang Shipyard on the labour and materials needed for shipbuilding. The author drew this information from multiple sources, suggesting that he was comparing these sources to each other. Moreover, both prescriptive and descriptive data were collected, with the prescriptive information being taken from the shipbuilding manuals, and the descriptive data from constructions of real ships. The combination of these various types of information suggests that the managers of the shipyard were aware of discrepancies among them. A main reason for writing the *Treatise* was to record and analyse these discrepancies, with a view to keeping a tight rein on labour and material costs to prevent pilfering and other types of corruption. Li Zhaoxiang was making a clear connection between the collection of ship data in Chapter 7 and the efforts to combat corruption when he said, in his explanation of the way in which the various parts of the *Treatise* fit together, translated above, “if corruption is not fully eradicated, there will be loss of equilibrium. Thus I have followed [Chapter 6, on

corruption] with [Chapter 7].”

While numerous questions arise from the *Treatise* and many still remain unanswered, an examination of these two chapters has yielded some preliminary findings on important technical matters. These are discussed in the following sections below: (A) The wood that was used to build the ships, (B) The nature of the *liao*, and (C) The length–beam ratios of the ships.

(A) The wood that was used to build the ships

The main type of wood used in the shipyard seems to have been *nanmu*, since the largest quantities are mentioned for this type. Mechtild Mertz has identified this wood as *Phoebe spp.*⁵⁴ The second most common type is *chuan shan mu*, “China fir produced in Sichuan”.⁵⁵ The third seems to have been pine (*song mu*). Elm (*yu mu*) is mentioned most often for the rudderposts, while sandalwood (*tan mu*) is listed as used for the rudder blade in at least one ship. Although two types of sandalwood grow in China, *huangtan* (*Dalbergia spp.*) and *qingtan* (*Pteroceltis tatarinowii*),⁵⁶ the sandalwood used in the Longjiang ships does not necessarily have to have been one of these types, and may even have come from outside China. Sichuan fir is mentioned as the wood used for the masts and oars on the Imperial Ship. We are told that five logs of Sichuan fir produced ten oars, and that the flagpoles for this ship were made of *zhong shan tiao*, probably poles of medium-quality fir. The spars were also made of fir. The caulking material consisted of *tong* oil, white hemp and lime. The mat sails were made of two different kinds of bamboo: *qinggui* and *mao* bamboo. Manufacture of the sails required coir from palm, yellow rattan, and broad-leaved bamboo leaves.

The use of woods specific to needs and careful delineation thereof speaks to the awareness of the authorities and their ability to exploit resources for specific imperial goals. It is also a testament to the sheer vastness of the Ming Empire and the scope of its natural resources, though as Aurelia Campbell demonstrates, these resources could be exhausted by the state’s massive construction projects and building plans.

It is puzzling that, despite the prevalence of *nanmu* in the Longjiang Shipyard, no *nanmu* was reported among the finds from the excavation of the Treasure Shipyard carried out in 2003–2004.⁵⁷ There are several possible explanations for its absence. First, as Scheuring points out, and others have also indicated, it is important to stress that these were two

different shipyards. As I have written elsewhere,⁵⁸ they were located on different sites, had different purposes, and different historical trajectories. Although they were located in close proximity, the Longjiang Shipyard functioned throughout the Hongwu and Yongle periods and beyond, whereas the Treasure Shipyard was in operation for only about 30 years (1403–1433), when the ships for the maritime expeditions were being built. These “treasure ships” were most likely large, ocean-going ships, presumably quite different from the ships built in the Longjiang Shipyard, which were relatively small, manoeuvrable ships used to protect and patrol coastal cities and villages on inland rivers and lakes. Perhaps *nanmu* came to be used later, after the treasure ships were discontinued. Of course *nanmu* may have been present at the Treasure Shipyard but just not found among the only 235 pieces analyzed during the excavation. According to the excavation report, 645 pieces of wood were removed from Basin No. 6, and an additional 1,615 pieces remained embedded in the bottom of the basin, neither removed nor tested.⁵⁹

There seems to have been a distinction between wood used for the structure of the ship, called simply “wood” (*mu*), and wood categorised under the heading “decoration” or “finishing” (*zhuangxiu*). These are listed separately in the *Treatise*. The former probably refers to the wood used for building the main structural parts of the ship, while the latter most likely refers to the superstructure. A large amount of wood was used for decoration and finishing in the Imperial Readiness Ship, probably because it was for imperial use. More work needs to be done to distinguish such different forms of wood as single-planks (*danban*) from such forms (which are not completely understood) as single-planks-joining-together-two-or-three-timbers (*bing lian er lian san fang gong danban*), as listed among the materials. Some of the chemicals, metals, sail-making supplies, textiles, and other materials deserve further study, in addition to the wood.

(B) The nature of the *liao*

The results of the investigations into the nature of the *liao* have not been conclusive to date. It is clearly another area that needs further research, and it is hoped that the information in the *Longjiang Shipyard Treatise*, when it is understood more thoroughly, will throw some new light on the subject.

As noted above, one meaning of the term *liao* is “material,” and the *liao*, at least before the Tang period, was thought to have had something to do with the amount of material used to build a ship. Han Zhenhua

suggests that the *liao* may have been a kind of variable that was plugged into various formulae to determine quantities of wood, caulking material, iron nails and other materials used to construct ships.⁶⁰ Because the size in *liao* is specified in the names of seven of the ship types, it may be possible, as Sleeswyk has attempted, to see a correlation between the number of *liao* and the amount of some of the materials used to build it.

Table 2.9 The seven ships with *liao* in their names, and the amounts of certain materials used for each

Ship type	100-liao Combat Ship	150-liao Combat Ship	200-liao Combat Ship	200-liao Patrol Ship	200-liao Sand Patrol Ship	400-liao Combat Ship	400-liao Transport Ship
Materials							
qinggui bamboo	100	250	260 201	115	140	400 424	315
tong oil (jin)	120	250	250	100	250	700	600
hemp (jin)	120	250	250	100	250	700	600
lime (jin)	240	500	500	440	500	1400	1200
Iron nails (jin)	230 217	420 418 146	470 4039 350	470	470 400	1428 1820	910 585

A relationship is certainly claimed between the amount of wood used to build the ships and the size in *liao*. However, if one examines the amount of wood specified for these ships, a clear correspondence does not emerge. The wood is separated into too many different species, and they are not all understood at this point. For this reason, no attempt can be made to correlate numbers of *liao* with amounts of wood without further research.

However, careful examination of the materials table shows a rough correlation between the number of *liao* of a ship and the amounts of a small selection of other materials, besides wood, used in the construction. These include *qinggui* bamboo, probably used to stiffen sails,⁶¹ Chinese *tong*-oil, hemp, lime for caulking, and iron nails. These correspondences, shown in *Table 2.9* for each of the seven ships whose names specify their size in *liao*, are not surprising, as larger ships would naturally require more of these materials. Where more than one amount is listed in a cell of this table, it is because the *Treatise* gives figures from more than one source.

There are some anomalies in *Table 2.9*. For example, for the 200-*liao* Combat Ship, the figure 4,039 for the number of nails mentioned in one

of the sources is very much larger than in the other sources, and is therefore probably an error. More study needs to be done, but what is important is the correspondence between the amounts of certain materials and the size of the ships in *liao*.

(C) The length–beam ratios of the Longjiang ships

Table 2.10 Sizes of Zheng He’s ships as given in the novel

Type	No. of masts	Length (zhang)	Beam (zhang)	Length in ft (m)	Beam in ft (m)	Ratio (L to B)
Treasure ships	9	44.4	18	453 ft (138 m)	184 ft (56 m)	2.46
Horse ships	8	37	15	377 ft (115 m)	153 ft (47 m)	2.46
Supply ships	7	28	12	286 ft (87 m)	122 ft (37 m)	2.34
Billet ships	6	24	9.4	245 ft (75 m)	96 ft (29 m)	2.55
Combat ships	5	18	6.8	184 ft (56 m)	69 ft (21 m)	2.67

Because so little information is available about the ships in Zheng He’s fleet, scholars like Pao Tsun-peng have sometimes looked to the sixteenth-century novel about Zheng He’s exploits in the “Western Oceans,” Luo Maodeng’s *Sanbao taijian xiyang ji*, as a source for their dimensions. The novel lists five rates of ship claimed to have been used on the voyages, together with their sizes and number of masts.⁶² Table 2.10 gives the length and beam measurements of these ships, along with their length-to-beam ratios. The dimensions are given in *zhang*, as well as feet and metres, taking one *zhang* as equal to 10.2 ft and 3.11 m, and are rounded off to the nearest integer.

I have argued elsewhere, based on work done by Chinese scholars, that the dimensions of the ships in the *Ming shi* are probably derived directly or indirectly from the novel.⁶³

An interesting point of comparison between the dimensions of the ships in the novel and those in the *Treatise* is their length-to-beam ratio. It will be noted from Table 2.10 that the ratio for the ships in the novel is between 2.34 and 2.67 to 1, which is very low, given the principle that ships should become elongated as they increase in size.⁶⁴ The Longjiang ships, which are much smaller than the hypothetical Zheng He ships, have a much higher ratio (between 4.133 and 6.074, see Table 2.1). The

graph in [Figure 2.8](#) shows the length-to-beam ratios for the five rates given in the novel in ascending order of size:

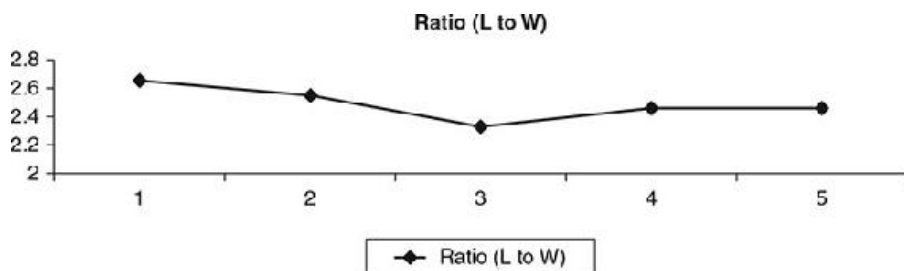


Figure 2.8 The length to beam ratio for the five ships in Zheng He's fleet according to the novel

If one compares these ratios to the length-to-beam ratios taken from [Table 2.1](#) for the 21 ships built in the Longjiang shipyard for which we have length and beam measurements, also plotted from smallest to largest ship, one finds that the Longjiang ratios are not only significantly higher but also much more irregular (see [Figure 2.9](#)).

It is important to remember that these are very different types of ship: those built in the Longjiang shipyard were made for sailing on rivers and lakes, whereas Zheng He's ships were for sailing on the high seas. While this difference in purpose may help to explain certain discrepancies, it is still difficult to explain why the smaller ships built in the Longjiang shipyard should have a higher length-to-beam ratio than Zheng He's hypothetical large ships. In my view, it is a further indication that something is wrong with the dimensions given in the *Ming shi* for Zheng He's ships.

Of course there are many more ships listed in the *Treatise* than in the novel, so there are more opportunities for irregularity to show up, but it seems that the ratios for the ships in the novel are almost too perfect, while those in the *Treatise* are consistent but realistically irregular. It is puzzling, however, that there is so much consistency in the length-to-beam ratios of the Longjiang ships, despite their range in length from 2.23 *zhang* (22.75 ft, or 6.94 m) to 8.95 *zhang* (91.29 ft, or 27.83 m).

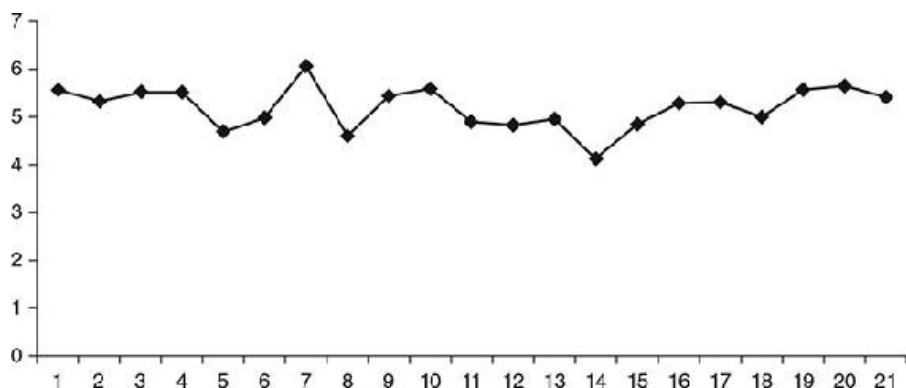


Figure 2.9 Length to beam ratios for 21 ship types built in the Longjiang shipyard

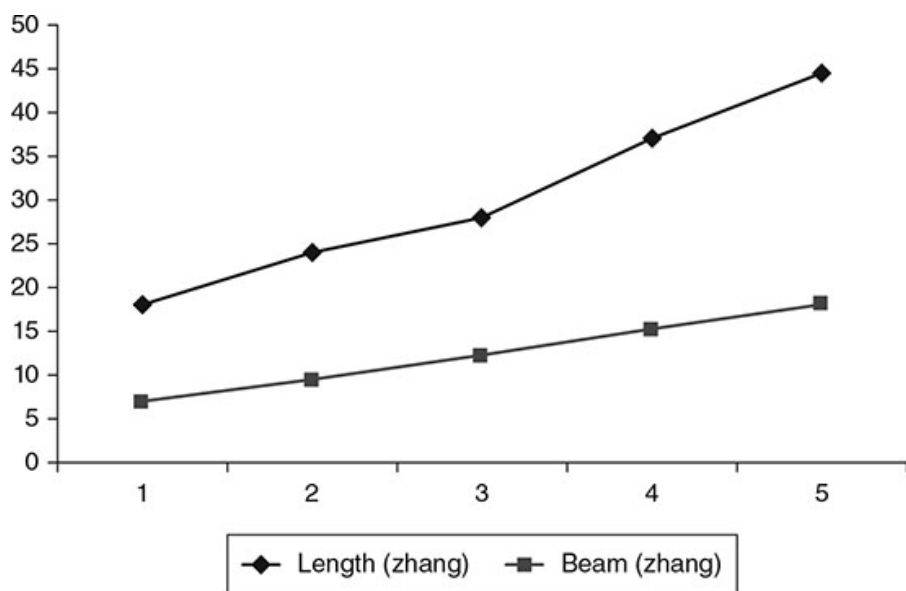


Figure 2.10 Length and beam measurements for the five rates of ships as described in the novel, from smallest to largest size

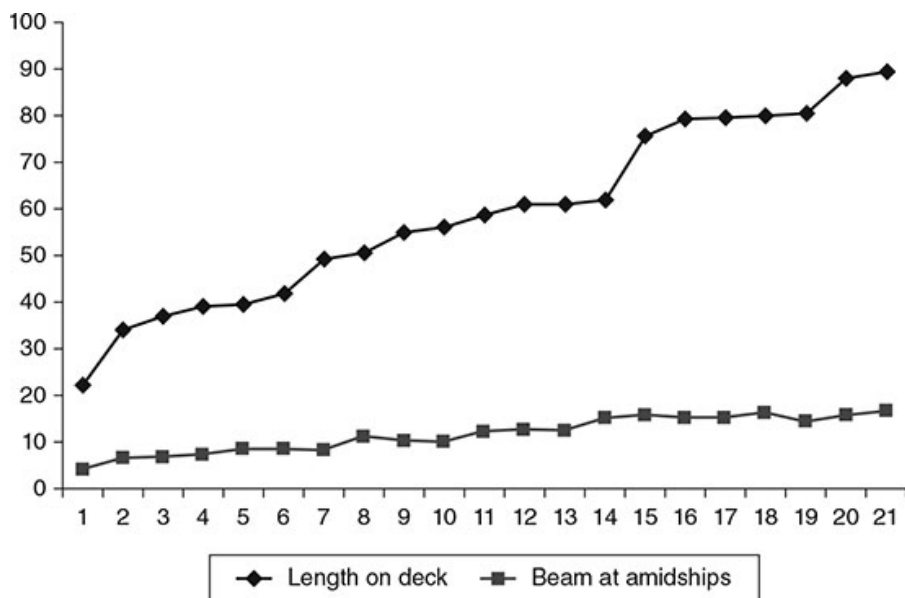


Figure 2.11 Length and beam measurements of 21 ship types built in the Longjiang shipyard

If we examine the increase in the length and beam as the ships become larger, a graph can be obtained by plotting the length and beam measurements of the five ships in the novel in ascending order of length (Figure 2.10). The top line represents the lengths of the five rates given in the novel in ascending order, and the bottom line shows the corresponding beam measurements. For the Longjiang ships plotting the length and beam measurements as they increase in size results in the graph in Figure 2.11, with the top line representing the length on deck for each ship and the bottom line showing the corresponding beam amidships. Although, again, there are only five examples of ships in the novel and 21 from the *Longjiang Shipyard Treatise*, it still appears that the rate of increase for the ships in the novel is much smoother and perhaps more contrived than that for the Longjiang ships, which shows a healthy irregularity along with its general consistency. The number of masts is also said to increase by one for each increased size of rate, which again appears too perfect. Thus the dimensions in the novel appear suspiciously to have been derived by extrapolating the proportions of one model of ship to four others. Although these graphs do not serve as proof, in my opinion they support the view that the ships in the novel are fictional ships, whereas those recorded in the *Longjiang Shipyard Treatise* are based on real ships.

It has been said that a shipwreck is a form of time capsule, because any wrecked ship had to have been en route from one particular place to

another, carrying a particular cargo, with a particular mission. Similarly, the *Longjiang Shipyard Treatise* of 1553 is a snapshot of a set of ships of a particular nature, from a particular place, and within a relatively narrow time span. In addition to providing information on construction methods, management procedures, labour activities and shipbuilding materials, the *Treatise* can also help set the shipyard in its historical, social, economic, political, and military context and thus provide a unique perspective on the history of the early Ming period. This chapter has been able to provide only a brief summary of the contents of the *Treatise* concerning the materials, labour requirements, and size of ship. Ultimately it is hoped that a translation and critical edition of the *Treatise*, which is currently being undertaken, will make an important contribution to the study of Ming shipbuilding and Chinese marine culture and architecture in general.

NOTES

- 1 Joseph Needham, Wang Ling and Lu Gwei-djen, *Science and Civilisation in China*, Vol. IV, Pt. 3, *Nautical Technology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 382 and 402.
- 2 Another is the *Nanchuan ji*, which is discussed below.
- 3 Li Zhaoxiang was a scholar-official from Shanghai. He had passed the provincial civil service examinations in 1537, and obtained his *jinshi* degree ten years later. He was first appointed as a District Magistrate (*zhi xian*) in 1547, and then served in the Ministry of Works in Nanjing, before taking up his post at the shipyard. The work is Li Zhaoxiang, *Longjiang chuanchang zhi* (*Longjiang Shipyard Treatise*), 1553, in *Xuanlantang congshu xuji*, vol. 117, facsimile edition. References here are to the modern edition edited by Wang Lianggong (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1999).
- 4 Needham et al., *Science and Civilisation in China*, Vol. IV, Pt. 3, 482.
- 5 There are many sources about ships and shipbuilding outside of China. The English record is quite good, with the first dry dock constructed at Portsmouth in 1495 under the orders of Henry VII, and another at Chatham founded in 1547. The collections of Royal Navy letters are said to be “so detailed as to be virtually unusable without unlimited time,” Jonathan G. Coad, *The Royal Dockyards 1690–1850: Architecture and Engineering Works of the Sailing Navy* (London: Scholar Press, 1989), 1 and 385.
- 6 The *Longjiang Shipyard Treatise* makes a few references to the Treasure Shipyard. See, Sally K. Church, “Traces of a Memory: References to Zheng He’s Voyages in the Longjiang Shipyard Treatise,” in Shanghai Chinese Maritime Museum, ed., *The Position and Mission of China’s Maritime Culture (Zhongguo hanghai wenhua zhi diwei yu shiming)* (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 2011), 97–109.
- 7 Lo Jung-pang, “The Decline of the Early Ming Navy,” *Oriens Extremus* 5.2 (1958), 149–68.
- 8 Lo Jung-pang says: “The superintendents of merchant ships (*shibosi*) were eunuchs. Invested capital in overseas commercial ventures and built large ships to trade abroad.” See Lo, “Decline of the Early Ming Navy,” 156.

- 9 Kwan-wai So, *Japanese Piracy in Ming China during the 16th Century* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1975), 29 and 180. Also see Kenneth M. Swope, "Cutting Dwarf Pirates Down to Size: Amphibious Warfare in Sixteenth-Century East Asia," in Maochun Yu, ed., *New Interpretations in Naval History: Selected Papers from the Fifteenth Naval History Symposium* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2009), 81–110; and the chapters by Roland Higgins and Ivy Lim herein.
- 10 For example, Zheng He eradicated the pirate Chen Zuyi from Palembang, which was his base of operations, on the return journey from his first voyage in 1407. J.V.G. Mills, trans. and ed., *Ma Huan, Ying-yai sheng-lan: The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores [1433]*, Hakluyt Society Extra Series 42 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 99–100.
- 11 *Ming Taizu shilu*, Hongwu 4, 12th month, *yiwei* (22 Jan 1371) (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiu yuan, 1962–1967), *juan* 70:7a–b, 1307–1308; Hongwu 14, 10th month, *yisi* (4 Nov 1381), *juan* 139:7a, 2197; and Hongwu 27, 1st month, *jiayin* (14 Feb 1397), *juan* 231: 2a–2b, 3373–3374.
- 12 *Ming Taizong shilu*, Yongle 2, 1st month, *xinyou* (29 Feb 1404), *juan* 27:4b, 498.
- 13 Chen Wenshi, *Ming Hongwu-Jiajing jian de haijin zhengce* (The Ming Maritime Prohibition Policy, From the Hongwu to the Jiajing periods) (Taipei: Taiwan University, 1966), 36. Needham mentions this as well, and notes orders repeating this in 1525 authorising officials to destroy ships that violated this stipulation and arrest their operators, and in 1551 to declare those who disobey to have committed crimes "analogous to espionage." See Needham, *Science and Civilizations*, Vol. IV, Pt. 3, 527.
- 14 Chen Wenshi, *Ming Hongwu-Jiajing jian de haijin zhengce*, 102.
- 15 For example, in 1404, Japan captured a particular set of pirates in response to Emperor Yongle's request, and sent them to China for punishment. See So, *Japanese Piracy*, p. 167. Japan also established a system for licensing ships to trade with China. Hoshi Ayao, *Mindai sōun no kenkyū* (Tōkyō: Nihon Gakujutsu Shinkōkai, 1963); English abstract trans. by Mark Elvin, *The Ming Tribute Grain System*, Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1969, 78–9.
- 16 As a result, new orders were issued insisting on strict enforcement of previous orders prohibiting private contact and trade with foreigners. See *Ming Xuanzong Shilu*, Xuande 8, 7th month, *yiwei* (18 July 1533), *juan* 103:8b, 2308.
- 17 Lo, "Decline of the Early Ming Navy," 162.
- 18 So, *Japanese Piracy*, 3–4; Hoshi, *The Ming Tribute Grain System*, trans. by Elvin, 79. Also see Zheng Liangsheng, *Mingdai Zhong-Ri guanxi yanjiu* (Taipei: Wenshizhe chubanshe, 1985), 110–252, on tribute trade between Japan and the Ming.
- 19 Lo, "Decline of the Early Ming Navy," 158.
- 20 See Chen Wenshi, *Ming Hongwu-Jiajing jian de haijin zhengce*, 94–7; So, *Japanese Piracy*, 41–50; Needham, *Science and Civilisation*, Vol. IV, Pt. 3, 525–6; and Lo, "Decline of the Early Ming Navy," 156–7.
- 21 So, *Japanese Piracy*, 4.
- 22 So, *Japanese Piracy*, 15–16.
- 23 Zhang Tingyu et al., *Ming shi* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), *juan* 304, 7766–8.
- 24 This question is discussed at length in Sally K. Church, "Zheng He: An

Investigation into the Plausibility of 450-ft Treasure Ships,” *Monumenta Serica* 53 (2005), 1–43.

- 25 This inscription, commonly known in Chinese as “Nanjing Jinghai si canbei,” (Stele fragment at Nanjing’s Jinghai temple), is referred to by J.J.V. Duyvendak, “The True Dates of the Chinese Maritime Expeditions in the Early Fifteenth Century,” *T’oung Pao* 34 (1938), 341–412, esp. 369, n. 1, and Mills, *Ma Huan*, 241–2. It is transcribed in Zheng Hesheng and Zheng Yijun, *Zheng He xia Xiyang ziliao huibian* (Jinan, Shandong: Jilu shushe, 1980), vol. 1, 202. See also Han Zhenhua, “Lun Zhongguo chuan de chuanliao ji qi jisuan fazhi,” *Haijiaoshi yanjiu* 13.1 (1988), 197–205; Chen Xiyu, “Investigation on the Unit ‘Liao’ for Junks in Song Dynasty” (Songdai chuan liao chu tan), *Proceedings of the International Sailing Ships History Conference*, Shanghai, China (4–8 Dec., 1991), sponsored by the Shanghai Society of Naval Architecture & Marine Engineering, and the Marine History Researchers’ Association of CSNAME, pp. 270–274; André Wegener Sleeswyk, “The *Liao* and the Displacement of Ships in the Ming Navy,” *The Mariner’s Mirror* 82.1 (February 1996), 3–13; and Sally K. Church, “The *Liao* as a Measure of Zheng He’s Ships,” *Proceedings of International Academic Forum in Memory of the 600th Anniversary of Zheng He’s Expedition* (Nanjing, China, July 2005), 505–13.
- 26 This was said to have been true before the Tang period (618–906). (One meaning of the word *liao* is “material.”) It became a cargo capacity unit during the Tang, according to Wang Cengyu, “Tan Song dai de zaochuan ye,” *Wenwu* 10 (1975), 24–7. Hans Lothar Scheuring also mentions this in his *Die Drachenfluß-Werft von Nanking: Das Lung-chiang ch’uan-ch’ang chih, eine Ming-zeitliche Quelle zur Geschichte des chinesischen Schiffbaus*, Heidelberger Schriften zur Ostasienkunde, Band 9 (Frankfurt/Main: Haag und Herchen, 1987), 120–21. I am indebted to Dr Scheuring for sending me a copy of his book.
- 27 These two site-maps may therefore be familiar to the reader because they are reproduced in Needham et al., *Science and Civilisation in China*, Vol. IV, Pt. 3, 483, Fig. 981.
- 28 I have translated one section of this chapter on “Ten Corrupt Practices in Shipbuilding” (*Zao chuan zhi bi you shi* 造船之弊有十), some of which involve pilfering of materials and inadequate expenditure of labour on certain crucial tasks, such as caulking (Li Zhaoxiang, *Longjiang Shipyard Treatise*, 129–32), in my article entitled “Ming Dockyard Management,” *Marine Quarterly*, (Spring 2018), 87–92.
- 29 Scheuring, *Die Drachenfluß-Werft*, 164–370.
- 30 Li Zhaoxiang, *Longjiang chuanchang zhi*, Chapter 1, 1–2.
- 31 Li Zhaoxiang, *Longjiang chuanchang zhi*, Chapter 1, 2.
- 32 Anqing is a city in present-day Anhui province on the Yangzi River, about 250 km southwest of Nanjing. Jiujiang is another city on the Yangzi River, in Jiangxi province about 150 km southwest of Anqing. Regarding Jinshui, in the Ming period a river called Jinchuan ran from north-west of the city wall toward the Yangzi River. Pers. Comm. with Professor Xiao Hongyan, specialist on the urban history of Nanjing at the School of Architecture, Nanjing University. I am grateful to Lu Andong for putting me in contact with Professor Xiao.
- 33 Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1985), entry numbers 1351 and 1352, 179.
- 34 Li Zhaoxiang, *Longjiang chuanchang zhi*, Chapter 2, 40–84.
- 35 These equivalents are taken from the section on “Weights and Measures” in

Mills, *Ma Huan*, xvii. However, when one examines the archaeological discoveries of foot-rules, one gets a complex picture and realises that the length of a foot was not homogeneous during the Ming (or in any other period for that matter). Qiu Guangming lists as many archaeological discoveries as he knew about at the time, in *Zhongguo lidai du liang heng kao* (Beijing: Kexue, 1992), 100–105. The length of a foot was supposed to be standardised against the border markings on notes of Ming paper money, which also varied to a small degree (see the measurements taken of 39 extant examples of Ming paper money, on 105). Depending on where one measured the border on the note, one could obtain three different types of foot. A construction foot was 31.904 cm long, a surveyor's foot was 32.64 cm long, and a tailor's foot was 34.015 cm long. These were official measurements, but there were local variations as well as differences according to area of specialisation. For shipbuilding in the Ming, it seems best to take 31.3 cm as the size because that was the size of the foot-rule discovered in Basin No. 6 of the Treasure Shipyard. Nanjing Municipal Museum (Nanjing shi bowu guan), *Ming Dynasty Baochuanchang Shipyard in Nanjing* (*Baochuan chang yizhi: Nanjing Ming Baochuan chang liu zuotang kaogu baogao*) (Beijing: Wenwu, 2006), 66. Also see the discussion in Aurelia Campbell's chapter in the present volume.

- 36 Sally K. Church, "How Long is a Foot: The Size of the Ships used on China's 15th-century Maritime Expeditions." In *Proceedings of the Asia-Europe Workshop on Medieval Wooden Ships in Portugal, April. 2008*. (forthcoming)
- 37 Li Zhaoxiang, *Longjiang chuanchang zhi*, Chapter 2, 37. The modern edition has removed the type from the upper register of the first illustration and placed it within the text immediately after the title of this section. Other variations are referred to elsewhere in the *Treatise*. For instance, Chapter 6 says: "The temporary (unskilled) workers (*xiao jiang*), who are brought in [to help in the shipyard] from outside, are accustomed to using the 'short construction foot' (*yingzao xiao chi*), and this has thrown the measurement system into confusion." Li Zhaoxiang, *Longjiang chuanchang zhi*, Chapter 6, 129.
- 38 Li Zhaoxiang, *Longjiang chuanchang zhi*, Chapter 2, 37. The modern edition has removed the type from the upper register of the second illustration and placed it immediately after the discussion of the foot-rule (see previous note). There are some minor variations in the names of the ship models in this passage, as there are in other parts of the *Treatise*. These have not been normalised here, but are simply translated literally.
- 39 Thickness is an important variable for the analysis of stresses on ships, for example in this article: Sally K. Church, John C. Gebhardt and Terry H. Little, "A Naval Architectural Analysis of the Plausibility of 450-ft Treasure Ships," in Chia Lin Sien and Sally K. Church, eds., *Zheng He and the Afro-Asian World* (Singapore: International Zheng He Society, 2012).
- 40 Sleeswyk, "The *Liao* and the Displacement of Ships in the Ming Navy."
- 41 Sleeswyk later pointed out some difficulties with this formula. See "The Overall Dimensions of Cheng Ho's Largest Ships," *Mariner's Mirror* 90.3 (2004), 305–8.
- 42 Personal communication, from a study by Richard Barker in progress.
- 43 There is a long tradition of calculating labour in terms of work days. See Wang Cengyu, "Tan Songdai de zaochuan ye," 24. Scheuring refers to these work units as *Arbeitstagen* in his *Die Drachenfluß-Werft*, 154–8.
- 44 This is assumed because of the similarity of this table with the materials table, which begins with information from two shipbuilding manuals.
- 45 The word translated here as "sails" is *peng*, which means "sail" when it is written with the bamboo radical. It refers to mat sails as opposed to cloth sails.

- 46 He was from Wujiang in Zhili. He obtained his *jinshi* degree in Jiajing 17 (*mouxu*), or 1538. In Jiajing 20 (1541), he served as Secretary to the Bureau of Construction (*yingshan si*) and oversaw the construction of ships. He wrote *Nan chuan ji* in 4 *juan* at that time (1542). The *Treatise* says, “It is still relied on today,” i.e. in 1553.
- 47 Clam shells are a convenient local source of calcium carbonate for making quicklime, used in shipbuilding products such as *chunam*. (Richard Barker, pers. comm.)
- 48 There is another list of materials in Chapter 5, but no quantities are given for these. These too are broken down into categories. See Li Zhaoxiang, *Longjiang chuanchang zhi*, 121–3. The categories are: wood, bamboo, metals, colouring, hemp, oils, lime, leather and fur, textiles, and lacquer and paint.
- 49 According to Mills, one *jin* was equal to 596.8 grams or 1.31 lbs (*Ma Huan*, xvii). However, the archaeological discoveries of materials related to weights and measures show a great variety of equivalents for one *jin* even in just the Ming period alone. Qiu Guangming, in *Zhongguo lidai du liang heng kao*, 482–93, shows numerous illustrations of these materials, and tabulates all the finds. There are 88 finds from various places throughout China, and they range from 565 to 660 grams. He averages them out to 590 grams.
- 50 This might be carbon black, as in Indian ink, or soot, if it is from coal. (Richard Barker, personal communication.)
- 51 The word *pi* means a bolt of cloth.
- 52 Black coal (*mo mei*) is mentioned twice in the table, presumably because it has two different uses. It is not unusual for the same substance to be repeated under different headings.
- 53 Alternatively, this might be equivalent to alum, a fixative, or ox gall, a wetting agent still used with watercolour painting. (Richard Barker, personal communication)
- 54 I am grateful to Mechtild Mertz for pointing this out to me in a private communication. Joseph Needham has a note on *nanmu* identifying it as “*Persea nanmu* (B11, 512), a tree-laurel, often miscalled cedar, oak, etc.; syn. *Machilus nanmu* (R502).” Needham et al., *Science and Civilisation in China*, Vol. IV, Pt. 3, 411, note h.
- 55 This information is from Pan Biao, College of Wood Science and Technology (Mucai gongye xueyuan), Nanjing Forestry University (Nanjing linye daxue), personal communication.
- 56 Pan Biao, personal communication.
- 57 Nanjing Municipal Museum, *Ming Dynasty Baochuanchang Shipyard in Nanjing*.
- 58 Sally K. Church, “Two Ming Dynasty Shipyards in Nanjing and their Infrastructure,” in Jun Kimura, ed., *Shipwreck Asia: Thematic Studies in East Asian Maritime Archaeology* (Adelaide: Maritime Archaeology Program, 2010), 32–49.
- 59 Nanjing Municipal Museum, *Ming Dynasty Baochuanchang Shipyard in Nanjing*, 80.
- 60 Han Zhenhua, “Lun Zhongguo chuan de chuanliao ji qi jisuan fazhe.” He says, “The amount of *liao* for a ship originally referred to the material used for building the ship. Each 100 *liao* of ship required a supply of certain amount of building materials, such as wood, nails, oil and lime, and so forth. A specific amount was specified for each,” 204.

- 61 Bamboo must have been an important component of the sails since so many units or lengths of it were required for each ship. Note above, for example, that 700 units of *qinggui* bamboo and 4 units of *mao* bamboo were required for the Imperial Readiness Ship.
- 62 Luo Maodeng, *Sanbao taijian xiyangji*, 1597 (rpt. Beijing: Huaxia, 1995), Chapter 15, 122. Pao Tsun-p'eng uses these measurements as evidence for the size of Zheng He's ships. See his *On the Ships of Cheng Ho, Zheng He xia xiyang zhi baochuan kao*, National Historical Museum Collected Papers on the History and Art of China, 1st series., no. 6. (Taipei and Hong Kong: Zhonghua congshu, 1961), 4 (Chinese text), and 7 (English text).
- 63 See also Church, "Investigation into the Plausibility of 450-ft Treasure Ships," p. 4, based on research done by Xin Yuan'ou, "Guanyu Zheng He baochuan chidu de jishu fenxi," *Chuanshi yanjiu* 17 (2002), 1-20; Tang Zhibi, "Guanyu Zheng He baochuan chidu chu zi Yingyai shenglan de lundian zhiyi," *Chuanshi yanjiu* 11-12 (1997); and Tang Zhibi, "Zheng He baochuan chidu zhi wo jian," *Zheng He yanjiu* 47.2 (2001), 26-32, reprinted in *Chuanshi yanjiu* 17 (2002), 21-7.
- 64 This principle has been articulated by Guan Jincheng in his article, "Zheng He xia Xiyang de chuan," in *Dongfang zazhi* 43.1 (1947.1), 47-51, reprinted as "Jinian weida hanghaijia Zheng He Xia Xiyang 580 zhounian choubei weiyuanhui and Zhongguo hanghai shi yanjiu hui," in *Zheng He yanjiu ziliao huibian* (Beijing: Renmin jiaotong, 1985), 268-72.

CHAPTER 3

HOW YONGLE LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LOVE THE GUN

Perspectives on early Ming military history



Tonio Andrade

In recent years, scholars have developed a new appreciation for Ming warfare. The early Ming state was, they have shown, the world's most powerful gunpowder empire, possessing gun-bearing infantry that were more numerous and effective than those of any other state in the world.¹ Nor did the Ming lose its military mojo over the following centuries. Whereas previously the mid- and late-Ming Dynasty military was seen as backwards, conservative, and ineffective, recent work has established that throughout the 1500s and early 1600s the Ming undertook a series of strikingly innovative reforms and adaptations, which kept it a major military power until its sudden military collapse in the late 1630s.²

Scholars have drawn attention to many different aspects of Ming

military history – the wide and deep use of firearms in its armed forces (the proportion of firearm-toting units was higher than in Europe from the 1300s through the mid-1500s); the rapid and effective adoption of gunpowder technology from other peoples (from Vietnam, from the Portuguese, from the Japanese, from the Ottoman Empire, from northern Europe); the effective use of advanced (by the standards of Europe) infantry tactics such as the volley technique; advanced hybrid metallurgical cannon casting techniques; experiments with broadside ships and Renaissance artillery fortresses; and so on. Yet there is much work yet to be done, and this is particularly true of the early Ming period.

This chapter focuses on the two-decade reign of the third Ming emperor, the bellicose and ambitious usurper Yongle (r. 1402–1424). Most work on early Ming military history has focused on his father, the founder of the Ming Dynasty, Zhu Yuanzhang. This makes sense, because, as historians have noted, Zhu Yuanzhang invested heavily in firearm manufacture, working to increase the proportions of gunners within his infantry, gunners who helped him overcome his powerful Han Chinese rivals, run the Mongols out of China, and expand China's borders, laying the groundwork for the long and successful Ming Dynasty.

Yet his son Yongle carried forth his father's firearms innovations, systematizing and expanding them. It was under his rule that the central administrative structure of Ming firearms use, the Firearms Commandery, was established, and Yongle increased the proportion of gunners beyond the levels in his father's armies. He also focused on the deployment of guns in his massive wars northwards against the Mongols and southwards against Vietnam (Đại Việt), and those wars helped stimulate firearms innovation, particularly the Đại Việt conflict.

Intriguingly, Yongle didn't start out as a partisan of the gun. Sources suggest that his attitude toward firearms changed as he made a transition from prince of the northern reaches to usurper fighting in the central plain. His embrace of the gun may thus shed light on a central problematic of Chinese military history: the question of whether guns evolved more slowly in China because the Chinese faced primarily mounted nomads as enemies, rather than infantry armies. As we'll see, it was during his war for succession in more southerly parts of China, to wit the central plains, that he came to appreciate the gun, and he did so, it seems, because guns were used successfully against him, leading to a significant defeat from which he barely escaped. After this episode, he rapidly increased his use of guns, and we can see further stages in his use of guns occurring during the huge military expeditions he undertook

after he finally defeated his rival and came to the throne. In his use of guns against the Đại Việt state (itself a powerful gunpowder empire) and the Mongols, we see the development and systematization of the Ming gunpowder empire, a coming into being of institutions and practices that would in some cases remain extant for the rest of the Ming Dynasty.

YONGLE

The Yongle emperor had grown up in a martial world. At the age of nine, his father named him the Prince of Yan and gave him a fiefdom based in the city of Beiping (current-day Beijing), admonishing him to “diligently drill the troops and defend the domain.”³ In the golden book he was given that day, his father noted that rulership was difficult and recalled his own rise: “I came from the peasantry, battled with so many warlords, and endured all kinds of hardships.”⁴ These battles and hardships were fresh in mind. The Ming Dynasty had been declared just two years previously, in 1368, and throughout the previous decade his father had fought one rival after another. Guns and other gunpowder weapons were significant factors in his eventual victory.

Sitting now upon the dragon throne, he encouraged his sons to undertake military training, and the future Yongle, i.e., the Prince of Yan, proved an eager pupil. The boy enjoyed riding and practicing and parading, and he trained hard, living in the rain and snow, learning the use of gunpowder, firearms, and traditional weapons.⁵ He grew into an impressive man: tall, athletic, and better looking than his father. At the age of seventeen he married the daughter of China’s top military man, Xu Da, who had helped bring his father victory on many occasions, as in 1367, when he captured the city of Suzhou, seat of the powerful King of Wu, Zhang Shicheng. The prince learned the art of war from his father-in-law and from another top general, Fu Youde, to whom the young prince served as aide-de-camp, helping in routine training, fortification, and patrols. He also accompanied his mentors northward on expeditions, including a famous 1381 campaign that his father launched against the Mongols, which gave a hint of his abilities as a field commander. When Xu Da died, the prince inherited the loyalty of the old general’s men, the best army in China. This loyalty would come in handy starting in 1398, when his father died and the throne passed to his nephew rather than to him.

The new emperor, who took the reign title Jianwen, was young – not quite twenty-one – but he understood that his uncle was a threat to his authority. The Prince of Yan, for his part, felt with some justification that he was more capable than his nephew. The young emperor had

more troops, more resources, and the legitimacy of the throne, but the prince was a canny leader and knew how to use deception. When imperial forces surrounded his palace in Beiping in 1399, he sent out word that he would surrender. His men waited for the two imperial officials charged with arresting him to enter the palace. Then the Prince of Yan had them seized and killed. The prince's small force of loyal guards quickly took control of Beiping and its military forces and then prepared to seize the imperial throne.

The ensuing war of succession was hard fought. The Prince of Yan was outnumbered, and the new emperor had the advantage of legitimacy, but the prince was a superior commander. For example, in one of the first major episodes, an imperial army said to be 300,000-strong was sent against him (the actual numbers were lower – perhaps 130,000). It might have seemed prudent to wait and let the army attack, relying on Beiping's stout walls, but instead the prince moved his army southward and attacked first. It was a bold wager, based on the calculation that the imperial army was still forming and might be broken if struck hard. He attacked the army's garrisons and encampments, using ruses and stratagems. On one occasion, he hid soldiers in the water under a bridge and hid scouts along the road to watch. When the scouts saw the enemy approach, they fired a signal cannon, at which the ambush was sprung. The imperials were trapped on the bridge and two top imperial commanders were captured.⁶ From these commanders he learned which imperial garrisons were weak. He moved against them, and soon he had routed the main imperial force.

At this point it might have seemed best to press the advantage and continue the attack, but he had a masterly sense of timing, so instead took his spoils northward – including more than 20,000 horses – and consolidated his control there. The imperials attacked Beiping but were ill-prepared for the northern winter, wearing thin clothes and poor shoes. When they gave up the siege and returned to the south, they were weak and sickly. The Prince of Yan decided to keep them tired. He made a feint to draw their attention, and, indeed, the imperials duly marched north again, and then, when the danger had lifted, turned back toward the south. Many died on the way back, leaving armor and equipment on the road.

In these early battles of the war of succession, the Prince of Yan used guns only peripherally. We see plenty of evidence of signal guns and occasionally guns used offensively or defensively, but never in core functions.⁷ This may seem odd. After all, we know that under the Prince of Yan's father, the Hongwu Emperor, some 10 percent of infantry were already armed with firearms, which indicates that there were on the

order of 150,000 gun units in Ming infantry forces.⁸ Why might the Prince of Yan have used fewer guns?

The Prince of Yan was used to warfare in northern China, and particularly to conditions in Mongolia. Kenneth Chase has argued in his influential book, *Firearms: A Global History to 1700*, that guns are far less useful against mounted nomads than against standard infantry armies, because early guns were slow and clumsy and ineffective on horseback.⁹ According to Chase, the fact that China faced primarily mounted nomads as enemies helps explain why it did not “perfect” guns whereas Europe did. The Chase thesis has some problems with it – most notably, the fact that it neglects the many other types of warfare that occurred in China. Southern Chinese warfare, for example, was quite a bit more like European warfare than was northern Chinese warfare.¹⁰ Yet if Chase’s conclusions are too sweeping, he is nonetheless onto something. Northern warfare was different from southern warfare; guns were used differently against mounted nomads.

Until the war of succession, the Prince of Yan’s experiences were primarily based on northern warfare. His father had deliberately situated his principedom in Beiping, knowing that his primary foes would be mounted nomads, primarily Mongols. The Prince of Yan was the second-highest ranking son but he was also the most able, and he ended up playing a major role in northern defenses, commanding various expeditions against “wild men” and frontier raiders. He was particularly successful against the Mongols. In early 1396, for example, he led troops to defeat a major Mongol force east of the bend of the Yellow River and then chased them to Uriyangqad, taking prisoner top Mongol commanders.¹¹ This type of warfare against Mongols frequently focused less on infantry – who were, after all, the primary types of troops armed with guns – and more on cavalry, who were generally armed with traditional weapons.

But when he fought against the forces of his nephew in the central plains of China, an area suited to infantry warfare, he experienced firsthand the devastating effect of guns. The most frightening battle of his life occurred in January of 1401. The prince, feeling confident, had moved against the commander-in-chief of the imperials, a general named Sheng Yong, who had garrisoned his troops in Dongchang City, in Shandong Province (present day Liaocheng City).¹² Although the sources differ on some particulars,¹³ the main contours of the battle seem clear. Sheng Yong had prepared carefully, feeding his troops, readying the walls, inspecting and reviewing battle formations, and, most importantly, “preparing and laying out firearms and poison crossbows to await [the Prince of Yan].”¹⁴ The prince’s troops were

confident, having won so many engagements, and they advanced at once upon Sheng Yong's troops. But when Sheng Yong's guns opened fire, the results were disastrous. The troops of the Prince of Yan "were all entirely wounded by the firearms."¹⁵

Sheng Yong, spirits buoyed by the arrival of reinforcements, pressed his advantage, and the prince found himself and his cavalry troops completely surrounded. As one source notes, "the Prince of Yan tried to attack and charge, but he couldn't escape."¹⁶ The enemy pressed in, and "the prince was in grave danger several times."¹⁷

Fortunately for the Prince of Yan, his nephew, the young emperor, had issued a filial order: no one was to harm the Prince of Yan, who, after all, had imperial blood. So although swords slashed close, the enemy soldiers never dared to cut him. The prince was saved by the arrival of some "barbarian cavalry troops," most likely Mongols who had joined the Ming. The mounted warriors charged the imperials' lines from the outside, extracted the prince, and galloped off. The prince survived, but the troops he left behind were less lucky. In the melee and under the fire of Sheng Yong's guns, perhaps ten thousand of the prince's troops expired.

All accounts of this key defeat focus on the devastating role of guns. The *Ming History* says that Sheng Yong "used firearms and powerful crossbows to annihilate the prince's troops."¹⁸ A history written by Ming scholar Tan Xisi noted that "Yan's troops suffered a great defeat from the firearms."¹⁹ The biography of Sheng Yong in the *Ming History* notes that "multitudes of Yan troops were wounded by the firearms."²⁰

The battle seems to have traumatized the prince. He was particularly preoccupied by the loss of one of his top generals, his friend and mentor Zhang Yu, who died trying to save him from encirclement. "Victory and defeat are part of life," he is said to have exclaimed, "but at a time like this to have also lost such a teacher [as Zhang Yu] is deeply lamentable."²¹ It seems that whenever the Battle of Dongchang was discussed, the prince became disturbed, having trouble eating and finding it impossible to rest.²² It is of course impossible to diagnose post-traumatic stress disorder from across a chasm of six centuries, but his symptoms certainly seem commensurate with such a diagnosis. And a traumatic battle experience like this – in which fear, responsibility, and near capture is combined with guilt at being saved while leaving comrades behind to die – is just the sort of thing to elicit such symptoms.

What is particularly intriguing, however, is that his military leadership

seems to have changed. In subsequent battles in the war of succession, he was much more diffident – less bold, less decisive. As the *Ming History* notes, at the beginning of his revolt “the prince’s troops had been victorious and able, and there was nothing like Dongchang, but from that point forward, the Prince of Yan’s troops went southward only to Xu and Jin. They didn’t dare again go to Shandong.”²³

There was an even more important change to the prince’s warcraft after Dongchang: he began to integrate guns more firmly into his warcraft. After Dongchang, guns are mentioned more frequently in descriptions of battles. His gun victories weren’t always glorious. On one occasion, for example, he launched a dawn gun attack on an imperial encampment, and the imperials mistook the gunfire for signal cannon on their own side. They rushed out the gate and, panicking under fire, fell into the deep trenches that they themselves had dug.²⁴ But there were also great gun victories, as when the prince’s gunmen terrified Sheng Yong himself. The prince had dispatched a small force of gunmen to creep close to the great general’s encampment. Once within range, they opened fire. The imperials threw down their weapons and ran. Sheng Yong was supposedly frozen with fear, unable to climb on his horse, and had to be carried to a waiting boat.²⁵

After the gunmen’s victory over Sheng Yong, the prince’s momentum increased. He moved closer and closer to Nanjing. The fall of the imperial city, however, was achieved not by arms but by intrigue. The prince had collaborators within the administration of the young emperor, whose policies had alienated key blocs of power, including the once-powerful eunuchs. When the prince entered Nanjing in the summer of 1402, he did so by the most traditional means in China’s military history: through a gate opened by conspirators.

The prince ascended the dragon throne and took as his reign title the term Yongle, “eternal happiness,” but his reign is remembered less for happiness than for outlandish ambition and profligate spending. Much of this spending went to a huge military buildup, in which firearms played a key role.

Historians have shown that the Yongle period (1402–1424) saw the highest sustained gun production levels of the entire early Ming period (1368–1521, i.e., Hongwu through Zhengde reigns).²⁶ This production – which sometimes reached around ten thousand guns per month – was overseen by new centralized facilities, most notably the famous Firearms Commandery, a bureau tasked with overseeing firearms production and training. The protocols and structures he established continued in use throughout the dynasty. Those protocols and structures emerged,

however, in a somewhat ad hoc fashion, as part of a series of massive expeditions Yongle undertook, southward against the Đại Việt state, and northward against the Mongols.

Yongle's Vietnamese War

Although it is barely mentioned in our history textbooks, the Ming Vietnamese War was one of the most important wars of the late medieval period.²⁷ Whereas armies in contemporary European conflicts numbered in the thousands or tens of thousands, Yongle sent more than two-hundred thousand troops to Vietnam. It was also a war in which both sides – but especially the Ming – employed the most advanced weapons in the world. Indeed, according to historian Sun Laichen, whose wonderful work has explored this war in detail, the spectacular victory of the Ming invasion force was due mainly to “Ming China’s military superiority, including firearms.”²⁸

To be sure, there is a tendency among some scholars to overrate Ming technological superiority. Wang Zhaochun has written, for example, that the first time the Ming invaded Vietnam, the Vietnamese had no firearms.²⁹ This was clearly not the case. As Sun Laichen points out, Vietnamese annals make clear that the Vietnamese state – known as Đại Việt – deployed guns against its long-term enemy to the south, the Cham state, against whom it had been fighting a series of increasingly desperate wars. The Chams were led by a warlike king, who invaded Đại Việt over and over again in the 1360s, 1370s, and 1380s. By 1390, the Đại Việt state was on the brink of collapse. Guns saved it. Đại Việt forces shot and killed the Cham king with a Ming-style gun [*huochong*].³⁰

The Vietnamese adoption of Chinese guns saved their state, and after 1390 Đại Việt began to enjoy the upper hand in its battles with Champa, as noted by John Whitmore in the present volume. Indeed, by 1471 the expansive Vietnamese state had defeated and annexed its longtime rival, relegating Champa to the status of a historical footnote, one that is largely ignored in the West, thereby obscuring the Vietnamese accomplishment and glossing over the crucial role of firearms in the process. Many Western authors still ignore the widespread presence of firearms in Southeast Asia prior to the large-scale arrival of Europeans and completely discount the role of the Ming in disseminating these firearms as chronicled ably by Sun Laichen in his many publications.

It’s rarely a good idea for a great power to get involved in Vietnam, so what made Yongle decide to invade? In 1404, a man appeared in Yongle’s court and said he was the legitimate heir to the throne of

Annam (i.e., Đại Việt) and that his family – the Tran – had been usurped by the Ho clan. After considerable diplomatic wrangling with the actual occupants of the Vietnamese throne, Yongle decided to try to reinstate the man. In early 1406, he sent five thousand soldiers to escort him to the Đại Việt capital. The expedition never made it. The Ho army ambushed them, killing most of the Chinese troops as well as Tran himself. When Yongle learned about the ambush he supposedly flew into a rage. “If we don’t destroy them,” he said, “then what are our armies for?”³¹

Was he really so furious? Had he really expected that five thousand Chinese troops would be able to impose his will on a state as powerful as Đại Việt? Or did he perhaps deliberately send a vulnerable force of escorts so that, once it was attacked, he would have a pretext for war?³² We’ll never know, but we do know that Yongle began preparing his campaign immediately after this outburst, and he put considerable care into it.

What is intriguing is that in making his preparations he recognized the fact that the Đại Việt troops were armed with powerful guns. He ordered his commanders to follow ten elements of his strategic plan, and among them was the following point:

[I have heard] that the enemy has prepared many firearms to resist the enemy. If our troops, when on the march, should encounter a mountain that is narrow and dangerous, they should rather avoid it than to waste our troops’ strength. Moreover, [I] have heard that the enemy has prepared its equipment not thinking that there is anything to stand up against it . . . [I] order that the Board of Works discuss the development and production of a thicker armor in order to withstand their firearms.³³

Following this exhortation are stipulations about how workers should weave the armor out of bamboo and strengthen it with leather, with clear benchmarks for testing its resistance to projectiles at various ranges.³⁴ Yongle, like his father, paid close attention to the role of guns.

He also took measures to prevent his advanced gun designs from being leaked to the enemy. “It is most important,” he commanded, that the miraculous weapon guns that are employed and all types of gunpowder weapons (huoqi) be kept in the strictest secrecy. It is not permitted to leak [them] to foreigners so that they can learn the techniques. When encountering the enemy, be certain to carefully and secretly gather them together [afterward].³⁵

How many gunners did Yongle send to Đại Việt? There are no detailed records, but we can make an estimate, based on the fact that a decree of

Hongwu stipulated that ten percent of Ming infantry units be gun units. Given that the Ming invasion force numbered 215,000, most of which were infantry, we can guess that there were on the order of twenty thousand or so gunners. The importance of guns is also suggested by the fact that among the top officers sent were at least four generals specifically in charge of firearms, referred to by the title “Miraculous Weapon General.”³⁶

Guns certainly appear in battle accounts. When the Ming troops moved southward, Đại Việt troops defended the passes into Vietnam with guns.³⁷ Ming forces easily defeated them and moved southward, stopping at the Red River to construct ships, which they armed with guns, quite possibly the bowl-mouth guns that were standard equipment on most Ming vessels by this point.³⁸ The Vietnamese attacked across the river with guns, but were routed, and the Ming were able to deploy their guns against a key point in the Đại Việt defense: the City of Do-bang, which guarded the entrance to the Red River plain, the heart of Vietnam.

Do-bang was amply armed with guns, but according to the *Ming Veritable Records*, the Vietnamese barely got a chance to fire them: Do-bang’s impressive walls were simply climbed in a brilliantly conceived and daringly executed night move. The *Veritable Records* says that Ming troops, holding bits in their mouth to enforce silence, snuck through the darkness to the walls, placed their ladders against them, and then climbed and began slashing at the defenders with swords. The latter were so surprised they didn’t even have time to shoot.³⁹ Vietnamese records, however, suggest that the *Veritable Records* may not have been so veritable: “The dead bodies [of the Ming soldiers] piled up as high as the city wall, but [the Ming troops] still kept climbing and fighting; nobody dared to stop.”⁴⁰ Both sources, however, indicate that Ming guns were not used to batter walls or gates or structures of any kind. They were aimed at people. And at elephants.

Once inside the walls, the Ming faced Đại Việt’s elephant troops. The beasts were huge, towering over cavalry, with frightening tusks. They broke formations, trampling soldiers and smashing everything in their path. They could grab enemy soldiers and hurl them into the air, or smash them with the forehead, or gore and gouge with tusks, or crush beneath knees.⁴¹ To counter the elephants, Ming firearm generals arrayed gunners to the sides of a Ming cavalry corps, whose horses had been given lion masks to scare the elephants. “The firearms general Luo Wen and others deployed guns (神機銃) in front at the flanks. The elephants all trembled with fear and were wounded by the gun arrows, and they all withdrew and ran away, at which the enemy troops

scattered in panic.”⁴² Other sources suggest that the Ming also shot rocket arrows at the elephants.⁴³ Ming soldiers pursued and continued picking off enemy soldiers with arrows, handguns, and heavier guns (*pao*), killing many.⁴⁴ Elephant troops had long been a challenge to Chinese armies, and this wasn’t the first time guns evened the balance. A famous battle in 1388 saw Ming gunners triumph against an enemy elephant corps in Yunnan.

In any case, with Do-bang defeated, Ming forces could move into the Red River Delta, and in these various battles of early 1407, firearms proved vital, as when on 21 February soldiers wielding firearms, including “bowl-mouth guns,” attacked a huge Đại Việt fleet, the “firearms like flying stars and lightning.”⁴⁵ As many as ten thousand Đại Việt troops were killed. On 18 March, Ming troops used “great general guns” to destroy more enemy ships. In early May, Ming forces, including four firearms generals, fought against a 70,000-strong Đại Việt force and hundreds of vessels. The Đại Việt were equipped with guns, but the Ming won decisively, killing as many as ten thousand and capturing hundreds of warships.⁴⁶ By summertime, Ming firearms generals and others were chasing the Ho king of Đại Việt southward. They caught him in mid-June, bringing the invasion to a successful close.

In the fall, six senior officers of the expedition returned to Nanjing to report the victory, including firearms general Zhang Sheng.⁴⁷ Yongle himself went to a city gate to welcome them home, and it was a major event, with all the civil and military officials in attendance. Doubtless there were crowds of onlookers as well, eager to catch a glimpse of the Đại Việt prisoners in their cages, among whom were the former king and his sons.

One son was Ho Nguyen Trung (Li Cheng, in Chinese), an expert in firearms who had been in charge of making guns for his father’s armies.⁴⁸ Whereas other members of his family were imprisoned, he was put in charge of manufacturing guns and gunpowder in the Ming Military Armory Department [*bīng zhāng jù*]. Eventually he rose to be the chief of the Ministry of Works, one of the top posts in the Chinese bureaucracy.⁴⁹ He was so revered for his work that he was even offered a ritual sacrifice when the Ming court held a memorial ceremony for the “God of Firearms.”⁵⁰ As a late Ming scholar wrote, circa 1606,

Our dynasty employed firearms to combat the northern barbarians, [which] are number-one weapons from ancient times to the present. However, the ingenious (*qīng miao*, meaning literally “light” and “wonderful”) techniques of these firearms were not obtained until Emperor Wen (Yongle) pacified Jiaozhi. Hence, [our dynasty] hired its false Grand Councillor . . . to work in the Ministry of Works, [to be] solely in charge of manufacturing [Vietnamese-style firearms], and all the

techniques were truly grasped.⁵¹

Nguyen Trung wasn't the only firearms expert the Chinese brought from Vietnam. In one cage was a Vietnamese firearms commander named Chen Tangmeng,⁵² and over the following months, thousands more prisoners arrived in the Ming capital, some of whom were artisans skilled at making gunpowder, guns (*huo chong*), and fire lances.⁵³ Indeed, historian Sun Laichen believes – with good reason – that the techniques and methods introduced by the Vietnamese helped transform Ming firearms technology. Perhaps the most notable improvement was a wooden chip that was rammed into place after the powder had been inserted, after which the projectile was placed on top. This created a complete occlusion of the barrel, so that the full force created by the gunpowder reaction was imparted to the missile.⁵⁴

Some historians even credit the Vietnamese with the creation of one of the most important military institutions of Ming China: the Firearms Commandery [*shen ji ying*]. The Firearms Commandery was one of the Three Great Commanderies of the Ming, central military structures based in the Ming capital. The other two great commanderies were devoted to infantry and cavalry. The Firearms Commandery was an elite fighting force in itself, but it was also responsible for training other divisions in firearms use.⁵⁵ It became a key part of Yongle's armed forces, but there are many mysteries about it.

We don't know, for example, when precisely it was founded. According to the official *Ming History*, “When Chengzu [i.e., Yongle] pacified Vietnam [Jiaozhi], the art of magical lances and guns was obtained, and a special Firearms Commandery was established to expand and practice it.”⁵⁶ But of course, the Ming knew of gunpowder weapons well before the invasion of Đại Việt, and there are various other bits of evidence to suggest other dates for the founding of the commandery.⁵⁷ We can say that it was probably founded sometime around 1409. That is in any case well before any remotely similar institution was established in Europe. Western historians have argued that the world's first “full-fledged” administrative organ pertaining to firearms was the artillery corps of the Frenchmen Jean and Gaspard Bureau, which appears to have been founded sometime around the year 1435.⁵⁸ But of course the Ming Firearms Commandery existed before that, and it was much larger. Whereas the Bureau brothers seem to have had thirty cannoneers and a small group of other technicians under their command,⁵⁹ the Ming Firearms Commandery had at least five-thousand men under it.⁶⁰

They practiced and drilled carefully. The loading and firing of a gun

was not as simple as we might imagine it to be and required considerable practice to train soldiers to do it smoothly, something that had to be second nature to them, because they might have to do it when confronted by Vietnamese elephants or Mongol cavalry. The powder had to be added in precise amounts, and the measurements required were inscribed on the powder scoops that seem to have been standard issue with guns starting in the early Ming.⁶¹ The powder was tamped down with a tamping rod. Examples of tamping rods have been excavated, although they are rare, because they were made of wood, which decomposes rapidly. On top of the powder was placed the “wooden horse chip”⁶² to contain the gunpowder explosion and increase the amount of energy imparted to the projectile. That was rammed down and then the projectile itself was added. Often the projectile was a hewn stone or cast iron ball, but there is evidence to suggest that many fire lances also shot arrows. Projectiles didn’t fit perfectly snugly against the side of the cannon, which is why you needed the plug. Then you’d hold the gun out, apply fire to the “fire-gate,” a bored hole in the body of the gun that led to the powder chamber, and the gun would go off. Ming guns were short, and the possibilities for misfires and backfire were legion, making training all the more important. Since most soldiers were illiterate, there were songs and chants to help them remember the stages.⁶³

All of this training was required just to learn to load and shoot the guns effectively, but gunners also had to learn to work in close coordination with each other and with other types of units. Drill and regimen were vital to the success of the endeavor, a fact which Yongle himself pointed out. He admonished his top military commander Liu Sheng to pay careful attention to training firearms units:

Magical-instrument *chongs* and *paos* are effective weapons for attacking in warfare, but in order not to make mistakes in using them, it is necessary to practice carefully and become proficient and skilled, and then one can use them when the occasion calls for it. You . . . must not be lax in this.⁶⁴

All this training paid off for Yongle when, accompanied by the Liu Sheng whom he admonished to pay attention to careful training, he personally marched northward against China’s greatest foes, the Mongols.

YONGLE MARCHES AGAINST MONGOLS

Although his father had driven the Mongols out of China, they were still considered a mortal threat. A new Genghis Khan might emerge and

unify the clans. So Yongle was determined to take the fight to them personally and led five expeditions against them. Guns played a key role.

Consider, for example, the first campaign, a massive expedition that departed Beijing in the spring of 1410. Western language treatments of it omit mention of firearms – including Kenneth Chase’s short discussion, but it’s clear that guns were present and played a significant role.⁶⁵ When, for example, Yongle’s forces engaged Mongol leader Arughtai near the Great Khingan Mountains, General Liu Sheng “used firearms, serving as the advanced guard, and badly defeated Arughtai.”⁶⁶ We find a slightly more detailed account in the *Ming Veritable Records*:

The emperor chased the enemy to Huiqujin and ordered the Anyuan Marquis Liu Sheng to take the magical-device guns and serve as the vanguard. The guns fired and their sound thundered forth for ten *li*, and each arrow penetrated two men, and [the projectiles] also struck the horses, and all immediately died. The enemy, frightened, spurred their horses and departed. Our troops advanced bravely and defeated them, beheading their famous generals and hundreds of men.⁶⁷

Four years later, Yongle led a second campaign against the Mongols, and records of it have left even clearer evidence for the effectiveness of guns. It was a huge expedition, containing around a half a million men.⁶⁸ A civil official named Jin Youzi described the cold rain and the emperor’s mood as they moved northward. “Look,” Yongle said to Jin, “at this expanse, empty in all four directions! It’s not something you see everyday. When you’re tired, sleep a bit, and then stand up and look out in all directions, and you’ll feel joy in your breast!”⁶⁹ He liked teaching him how to look for signs of wild game, like the paths through the grass made by antelopes and wild horses.⁷⁰ And he enjoyed instructing his soldiers how to search for traces of the enemy: hoofprints, horse dung along trails, dust swirling in the distance.⁷¹ He also liked teasing Jin and the other civil officials from the south, who weren’t used to the weather. On one occasion, for example, when Jin rode with one hand on his hat, to keep it from blowing away in the cold wind, Yongle had laughed and said, “The esteemed scholar isn’t having a good day today!”⁷²

Finally Yongle’s troops met the enemy. Thirty thousand or so mounted Mongols occupied hills, each of them having three or four extra mounts. Yongle ordered his troops to array themselves on the steppe below. A few skirmishes occurred, but it was in the early evening that Yongle made his move. In the gathering darkness, Yongle led a vanguard of elite cavalry units forward, followed closely by General Liu Sheng’s gun units. The Mongols came down, but Yongle didn’t charge at first. Instead, he waited while Liu Sheng’s guns opened fire. Several hundred Mongols fell, causing confusion and disarray in the Mongol ranks. At this point, Yongle and his cavalry – the elite iron horsemen – charged, driving the enemy back into the hills and capturing many horses. As Jin Youzi described the episode, when the Mongols came down the hills, finding the emperor too tempting of a target to resist they didn’t even

get a chance to strike before the guns fired in secret and the [emperor's] crack troops then again moved forward and attacked with great force, and each could stand against a hundred. The enemy was badly defeated, and the number of men and horses killed and hurt was uncountable, and they all screamed out in pain and left . . . Henceforth that place was called 'Barbarian Slaughtering Hold'.⁷³

Another account – in the *Veritable Records* – adds an intriguing detail: Liu Sheng's guns "fired in continuous succession." Historians in China have interpreted this passage – rightly I believe – as indicating the use of volley fire.⁷⁴ Given that western historians have hailed the later emergence of the volley fire technique in Europe as a hallmark of the military revolution, it is intriguing to find it here in Yongle's armed forces, but it is not surprising.⁷⁵ Historians of China have argued that the technique was used with firearms in China as early as 1388.⁷⁶ This makes sense, because the Chinese had used the volley technique for crossbows continuously since at the latest the Tang Dynasty, and probably earlier.⁷⁷

In any case, Yongle's gunners won a victory that day. Top Mongol commanders were killed and several thousand heads were captured, after which Yongle went after the survivors. In these subsequent battles, guns were similarly in evidence. When Mongol forces tried occupying highlands and small lakes, Ming troops "again used guns to first pound those occupying the two ponds, and these enemy, knowing they could not resist, withdrew. The remaining bandits, those who were on the peaks of the gorge, feared the guns would come again, and also withdrew and left."⁷⁸ Kenneth Chase does note the presence of guns on this expedition but downplays their importance, saying merely that guns frightened the Mongols.⁷⁹ Sinophone historians, on the other hand, believe – as I do – that guns played a dramatic role, causing significant casualties.⁸⁰

During the 1420s, Yongle led other expeditions against the Mongols, and then, too, he paid close attention to his gun units, focusing in particular on their drill and training. In the campaign of 1422, for example, he gave his generals precise and detailed instructions about drilling gunners so that they could coordinate effectively with cavalry:

The emperor ordered that all the generals train their troops outside each encampment by arraying the gunnery units [shen ji chong] in the front and the cavalry in the back, ordering the officers to practice and train in the free time. He admonished them as follows: "A formation that is dense is solid, while an advance force is sparse, and when they arrive at the gates of war and it's time to fight, then first use the guns to destroy their advance guard and then use cavalry to rush their solidity. In this way there is nothing to fear."⁸¹

Wang Zhaochun believes that Yongle was here discussing volley fire:

The meaning of this [passage] is that when fighting, the gun troops line up in front of the entire formation, and between them there must be a certain amount of space, so that they can load bullets and powder and employ shooting by turns and in concert to destroy the enemy advance guard. Once the enemy has been thrown into chaos, the rear densely arrayed cavalry troops together come forth in great vigor, striking forth with irresistible force.⁸²

It's impossible to know for sure, but it wouldn't be surprising. Yongle's willingness to place thin rows of gunnery units in the front lines of a battle against Mongol cavalry shows that he believed those gunners would offer enough fire to keep the cavalry at bay, which suggests volley fire, but the passage in the *Veritable Records* doesn't in itself make a clear case for it.

Whatever the drilling regime the troops practiced, they didn't get much of an opportunity to test it against the enemy, because this campaign didn't manage to find the enemy.⁸³ Yongle led subsequent expeditions northward against the Mongols, in 1423 and 1424, but those, too, were futile. The Mongols had learned to avoid Ming guns and instead simply slip into the steppes, to reemerge later at a time and a place of their choosing.

On the last Mongolian campaign, in 1424, Yongle became depressed and died of illness in Chahar, Mongolia. The expedition returned to Beijing, bringing his body in a sealed tin coffin. His funeral was as ambitious as his military exploits, and thirty palace women committed suicide to accompany him in death.⁸⁴ His successors stopped making incursions into Mongolia and pulled out of Vietnam, which had adopted Ming weapons and ended up defeating Ming armies badly. They halted the great maritime voyages Yongle had undertaken. As the *Ming History* noted, "During the Hong[xi] (1425) and Xuan[de] (1426–1435) reigns, [the Ming court] became accustomed to a routine and peaceful life."⁸⁵ The peace was interrupted in 1449, when Yongle's great grandson, Zhu Qizhen, the Zhengtong Emperor, tried reviving the practice of grand Mongolian expeditions but was captured by the Mongols, who then marched on Beijing.⁸⁶ Thanks to many guns and good leadership, the Mongols were driven off, with heavy casualties; sources suggest that the guns and other Ming weapons killed ten thousand Mongols.⁸⁷ By the mid 1450s, the Mongol threat had receded again, not to reappear in a serious way for another century.⁸⁸

China's powerful guns had helped the Ming to create the world's most powerful empire, unparalleled in military power, but it seems that the death of Yongle in 1424 also corresponded with the end of the period of rapid experimentation with guns and their administration. Indeed,

Sinophone historians argue that China's indigenous gun technology reached its apogee under Yongle. A set of regulations for firearm production and design that Yongle's administration issued in 1414 formed the basic blueprint for Ming firearms production for the next century, "becoming the Ming Military production method for guns."⁸⁹ In 1419, Yongle's court issued a new regulation according to which "all military weapons, aside from those that are kept for exercise or in deployment must be placed in the [central] armories . . . and there is not allowed any kind of private manufacture."⁹⁰ These two decrees can be taken to mark the end of China's period as the global leader of firearms technology. In the mid-1400s, just as Ming innovation was slowing, Europeans entered a period of rapid gun development, and when in the early 1500s Portuguese arrived on the Chinese coast, Ming officials were fascinated by their guns and began adopting them rapidly, effectively, and creatively. As Kenneth Swope and others have argued, the structures that Yongle had set up – particularly the Firearms Commandery – played an important role in the rapid adoption of European guns during the 1500s.

NOTES

- 1 See, for example, Li Huguang, *Da Ming diguo zhanzheng shi: da Ming longquan xia de huoqi zhanzheng* (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2010); Wang Zhaochun *Shijie huoqi shi* (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe, 2007), 103ff; Li Yue, "Ming dai huoqi de puxi," MA Thesis, (Dongbei shifan daxue, 2012) 5ff and 92.
- 2 The most significant works in English include Kenneth Swope, "Crouching Tigers, Secret Weapons: Military Technology Employed during the Sino-Japanese-Korean War, 1592–1598," *The Journal of Military History* 69.1 (2005), 11–41; Kenneth Swope, *A Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail: Ming China and the First Great East Asian War, 1592–1598* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press 2009); Kenneth Swope, *The Military Collapse of China's Ming Dynasty, 1618–1644* (London: Routledge, 2014); Nicola Di Cosmo, "Did Guns Matter? Firearms and the Qing Formation," in Lynn Struve, ed., *The Qing Formation in World-Historical Time* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 121–66; Peter Lorge, *The Asian Military Revolution: From Gunpowder to the Bomb* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Peter Lorge, "Development and Spread of Firearms in Medieval and Early Modern Eurasia," *History Compass* 9.10 (2011), 818–26; Peter Lorge, *War, Politics, and Society in Early Modern China, 900–1795* (London: Routledge, 2005); Kenneth Chase, *Firearms: A Global History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Hans van de Ven, ed., *Warfare in Chinese History* (Leiden: Brill, 2000). In Chinese see especially Wang Zhaochun *Zhongguo huoqi shi* (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe 1991); Wang Zhaochun, *Zhongguo kexue jishu shi: jun shi jishu juan* (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe 1998); Wang Zhaochun, *Shijie huoqi shi* (Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe 2007); Huang Yi-Long, "Ming Qing du te fu he jinshupao de xingshuai," *Qinghua xuebao*, 41.1 (2011), 73–136; Huang Yi-Long, "Ming Qing zhiji hongyi dapao zai dongnan yanhai de liubu jiqi yingxiang," *Zhongguo yanjiuyuan ji lishi yuyan yanjiusuo jikan* 81.4 (2010), 769–832; Huang Yi-Long,

- “Ouzhou chenchuan yu Mingmo chuanhua de xiyang dapao,” *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi huayan yanjiusuo jikan* 75.3 (2004). 573–634; Liu Xu, *Zhongguo gudai huoyao huoqi shi* (Zhengzhou: Daxian chubanshe, 2004); Li Huguang, *Da Ming diguo zhanzheng shi: da Ming longquan xia de huoqi zhanzheng* (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2010); Zheng Cheng, “Fagong kao: 16 shiji chuan Hua de Ou shi qian zhuang huopao jiqi yanbian,” *Ziran kexue shi yanjiu* 32.4 (2013), 504–22; Shi Kang (Kenneth Swope), “Ming–Qing zhanzheng zhong dapao de shiyong,” *Qing shi yanjiu* 2011.3, (2011), 143–9; Nan Bingwen, “Zhongguo gudai de niao chong yu Riben,” *Shixue jikan*, 1994.2 (1994), 60–66; Li Yue, “Ming dai huoqi de puxi,” MA Thesis, Dongbei shifan daxue, 2012; Xie Lihong, “Hongyi dapao yu Manzhou xingshuai,” *Manxue yanjiu*, 1994.2 (1994), 102–18; Feng Zhenyu, “Lun Folangji zai Mingdai de tuhua,” *Ziran bian zhengfa tongxun* 34.3 (2012), 57–62.
- 3 The Hongwu Emperor, “Treasure of the Prince of Yan,” from 1370, cited in Shih-shan Henry Tsai, *Perpetual Happiness: The Ming Emperor Yongle* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 26.
 - 4 The Hongwu Emperor, “Treasure of the Prince of Yan,” from 1370, cited in Tsai, 26.
 - 5 Tsai, 28.
 - 6 *Ming shilu*, *Taizong shilu*, juan 3; David B. Chan, *The Usurpation of the Prince of Yen, 1398–1402* (San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, Inc., 1976), 53.
 - 7 Many passages in the sources note his use of guns as signal devices, and on one occasion he had ordered a cavalry force to fire a hundred guns, but this was a scare tactic and a diversion. Once there is evidence that he considered firing guns at a recalcitrant city, but he evidently reconsidered. So guns appear not to have been a core arm used in his early campaigns.
 - 8 *Ming Veritable Records* juan 129, Hongwu 13, cited in Wang Zhaochun *Zhongguo huoqi shi*, 103.
 - 9 Chase, *Firearms*.
 - 10 See Tonio Andrade, “Maritime China in Global Military History: Some Reflections on the Chase Model,” in Kenneth M. Swope and Tonio Andrade, eds., *Early Modern East Asia: War, Commerce, and Cultural Exchange*, (London: Routledge, 2018); Kenneth Swope, “Review of Kenneth Chase, *Firearms*,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 47.2 (2004), 284–6; and Stephen Morillo, “Review of Chase, *Firearms*, and Lynn, *Battle*,” *Journal of World History* 15 (2004), 525–30.
 - 11 Tsai, *Eternal*, 55.
 - 12 My interpretation of this battle differs a bit from that of David B. Chan, 72ff.
 - 13 The *Ming shilu*, for example, which was approved by the Yongle Emperor himself, treats his defeat as a mistake caused by the disobedience of his soldiers, who didn’t listen to his careful instructions, and it also emphasizes his own role in saving himself from encirclement, rather than crediting the “barbarian cavalry” who, it seemed, really did save his skin, as well as crediting him with saving a soldier who’d lost his horse, sweeping the man under his arm and galloping to freedom. *Ming shilu*, *Taizong Shilu*, juan 6. <http://www.jjwxc.net/onebook.php?novelid=377293&chapterid=10> retrieved 2012-11-26.
 - 14 Gu Yingtai, “Yan wang qi bing.” *Mingshi jishi benmo*, juan 16.
 - 15 Gu Yingtai, juan 16.
 - 16 Gu Yingtai, juan 16.

- 17 Gu Yingtai, juan 16.
- 18 *Mingshi*, juan 5 (benji section, Chengzu 1).
- 19 Tan Xisi, *Ming da zheng zuan yao*, juan 11, 28a, available at <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/009448303>, retrieved 2012-11-27
- 20 *Mingshi*, juan 144, liezhuan 32, Sheng Yong, Ping'an, etc."
- 21 Gu Yingtai, juan 16.
- 22 Gu Yingtai, juan 16.
- 23 *Mingshi*, juan 142, liezhuan 30, Biography of Tie Xuan.
- 24 David B. Chan, 80.
- 25 David B. Chan, 81.
- 26 Wang Zhaochun, 101-3.
- 27 It isn't mentioned in Michael S. Neiberg, *Warfare in World History* (London: Routledge, 2001); or in Christon Archer, John R. Ferris, Holger H. Herwig, and Timothy H.E. Travers, *World History of Warfare* (Lincoln, USA: University of Nebraska Press, 2002); or in most Chinese history textbooks, or even in Xiaobing Li, ed., *China at War: An Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara, USA: ABC-CLIO, 2012).
- 28 Sun Laichen, "Chinese Military Technology and Dai Viet: c. 1390-1497," Asia Research Institute Working Paper Series No. 11, September 2003, 10.
- 29 Wang Zhaochun, *Zhongguo huoqi shi*, 106.
- 30 Sun Laichen, "Chinese Military Technology and Dai Viet: c. 1390-1497," 4. Sun draws the information from the *Dai Viet su ky toan thu* (Tokyo: Tokyo Daigaku Toyo Bunka Kenkyujo, 1984-86), vol 1, 464. Also the *Kham dinh Viet su thong giam cuong muc* (Taipei: Guoli Zhongyang Tushuguan, 1969), vol 11, 12a [this says *huopao*, which, Sun says, was a nineteenth-century alteration].
- 31 Cited in Jung-Pang Lo, "Intervention in Vietnam: A Case Study of the Foreign Policy of the Early Ming Government," *Qinghua xuebao*, 8[1970], 154-85. Also see Kenneth M. Swope, "Causes and Consequences of the Ming Intervention in Vietnam in the Early Fifteenth Century," in Craig Clunas, Jessica Harrison-Hall, and Luk Yu-ping, eds., *Ming China: Courts and Contacts, 1400-1450* (London: The British Museum, 2016), 37-45.
- 32 This is the conclusion of Jung-Pang Lo.
- 33 Li Wenfeng, *Yue qiao shu*, unpublished manuscript, circa 1540, juan 2, "Shu zhao zhi chi," fo. 17v. Copy held in University of Michigan Libraries, available online through Hathi Trust Digital Library, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015082430755>, retrieved 2012-10-22. I learned about this source through the work of Sun Laichen but was so intrigued I had to see it for myself.
- 34 Li Wenfeng juan 2, "Shu zhao zhi chi," fo. 17v.
- 35 Li Wenfeng, fo. 18v.
- 36 *Ming shilu*, *Yongle shilu*, juan 56, Yongle 4, Month 7, Day 4 (18 Jul 1406). Geoff Wade's otherwise excellent translation of this passage leaves out an "and others." See *Ming shilu Taizong shilu*, juan 56. Geoff Wade, translator, "Southeast Asia in the Ming Shi-lu: an open access resource," Singapore: Asia Research Institute and the Singapore E-Press, National University of Singapore, <http://epress.nus.edu.sg/msl/entry/902>, accessed October 17, 2012. But the names of other firearms generals appear elsewhere in the documents about the invasion. See Wang Zhaochun, 110, citing the *Mingshi jishi benmo*, juan 22; and, of course, Sun Laichen, who suggests that there were at least four firearms generals on the expedition. Sun Laichen, "Chinese Military Technology and Dai Viet: c. 1390-

1497,” 6.

- 37 *Ming shilu*, *Taizong shilu*, juan 60, Yongle 4, Month 10, Day 10 (20 Nov 1406), Geoff Wade, translator. <http://epress.nus.edu.sg/msl/entry/860>, retrieved October 17, 2012.
- 38 This is from Li, *Yue qiao shu*, juan 6, fol 6b and vol 10, fo 6b, cited in Sun Laichen, “Chinese Military Technology and Dai Viet: c. 1390–1497,” 7.
- 39 *Ming shilu*, *Taizong shilu*, juan 62, Yongle 4, Month 12, Day 11. My translation is a bit different from Geoff Wade’s. See *Ming shilu*, *Taizong shilu*, juan 62, Yongle 4, Month 12, Day 11 (19 Jan 1407), Geoff Wade, translator, <http://epress.nus.edu.sg/msl/entry/928>, retrieved October 17, 2012. Cf Wang Zhaochun 110.
- 40 *Dai Viet su ky toan thu* [Complete Book of the Historical Record of Dai Viet], cited in Sun Laichen, “Chinese Gunpowder Technology and Dai Viet, ca 1390–1497,” In Nhung Tuyet Tran and Anthony Reid, eds., *Viet Nam: Borderless Histories* (Madison, USA: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 72–120, 79.
- 41 Rob S. Rice, Simon Anglim, Phyllis Jestice, Scott Rusch, and John Serrati, *Fighting Techniques of the Ancient World (3000 B.C. to 500 A.D.): Equipment, Combat Skills, and Tactics* (New York: Macmillan, 2003), 126.
- 42 *Ming shilu*, *Taizong shilu*, juan 62, Yongle 4, Month 12, Day 11. My translation is a bit different from Geoff Wade’s. See *Ming shi lu*, *Taizong shi lu*, juan 62, Yongle 4, Month 12, Day 11 (19 Jan 1407), Geoff Wade, translator, <http://epress.nus.edu.sg/msl/entry/928>, retrieved October 17, 2012. Cf. Wang Zhaochun 110.
- 43 Sun Laichen, “Chinese Gunpowder Technology and Dai Viet, ca 1390–1497,” 79.
- 44 Sun Laichen, “Chinese Military Technology and Dai Viet: c. 1390–1497,” 7–8. Sourcing is from Li, *Yue qiao shu*, juan 6, p. 7a, juan 10, 7b–8a; *Ming shilu*.
- 45 Li Wenfeng, *Yue qiao shu*, juan 10, fo. 17r, cited in Sun Laichen, “Chinese Gunpowder Technology and Dai Viet, ca 1390–1497,” 80.
- 46 Sun Laichen, “Chinese Gunpowder Technology and Dai Viet,” 80.
- 47 *Ming shilu*, *Taizong shilu*, juan 71, Yongle 5, Month 9 (5 October 1407). Geoff Wade, translator. <http://epress.nus.edu.sg/msl/entry/1057>, accessed November 29, 2012.
- 48 *Ming shilu*, *Taizong shilu*, juan 71, Yongle 5, Month 9 (5 October 1407). Geoff Wade, translator. <http://epress.nus.edu.sg/msl/entry/1057>, accessed November 29, 2012.
- 49 Sun Laichen, “Chinese Military Technology and Dai Viet: c. 1390–1497,” 14–15.
- 50 Sun Laichen, “Chinese Gunpowder Technology and Dai Viet, ca. 1390–1497,” 92.
- 51 Shen Defu, *Wanli yehuo bian* 3 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1997), vol. 2, 433, cited in Sun Laichen, “Chinese Military Technology and Dai Viet: c. 1390–1497.”
- 52 *Ming shi lu*, *Taizong shilu*, juan 71, Yongle 5, Month 9 (5 October 1407). Geoff Wade, translator. <http://epress.nus.edu.sg/msl/entry/1057>, accessed November 29, 2012.
- 53 Sun Laichen, “Chinese Military Technology and Dai Viet: c. 1390–1497,” 14–15.
- 54 Sun Laichen, “Chinese Military Technology and Dai Viet: c. 1390–1497,” 14.
- 55 Wang Zhaochun *Zhongguo huoqi shi*, 106; Liew Foon Ming, *The Treatises on Military Affairs of the Ming Dynastic History (1368–1644), Part I* (Hamburg:

- Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde ostasiens e. V., 1998), 349.
- 56 Mingshi, “Bing 4,” cited in Wang Zhaochun, *Zhongguo huoqi shi*, 104.
- 57 See Wang Zhaochun, *Zhongguo huoqi shi*, 104–105.
- 58 Jack Kelly, *Gunpowder: Alchemy, Bombards, and Pyrotechnics: The History of the Explosive That Changed the World* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 48.
- 59 Jack Kelly, 48.
- 60 Liew Foon Ming, 349.
- 61 See Wang Zhaochun *Zhongguo huoqi shi*, 100–101.
- 62 These chips are discussed in various military manuals, such as the most famous Ming manual of all, Qi Jiguang’s mid-sixteenth century *Jixiao xinshu*. See Qi Jiguang, *Ji xiao xin shu: shi si juan ben* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2001). Wang Zhaochun believes, based on production quota data, that they were used in the early Ming as well. Wang Zhaochun, *Zhongguo huoqi shi*, 101.
- 63 There were even songs for the making of gunpowder, in the *huo long jing*, toward the very end. To my knowledge there’s no example of a gun-loading song from the Yongle period, but we can see what one might have been like by looking at a song from the mid-Ming period, from a military manual cited above. See Tonio Andrade, “The Arquebus Volley Technique in China, c. 1560: Evidence from the Writings of Qi Jiguang,” *Journal of Chinese Military History* 4.2 (2015), 115–41.
- 64 *Ming shilu*, *Taizong shilu*, juan 144, cited in Wang Zhaochun, *Zhongguo huoqi shi*, 104.
- 65 Chase, 44. Tsai, 168–170 (Tsai suggests that guns were not used until the second expedition, writing that in it Yongle “made use of prototype cannons and also blunderbusses” (171); W. Franke, “Yonglo’s Mongolei-Feldzüge,” *Sinologische Arbeiten* 3[1945]: 375–428, 379–81. Also see Henry Serruys, “The Mongols in China,” *Monumenta Serica* 27 (1968), 233–305.
- 66 *Ming shi*, juan 154, *liezhuan* 42.
- 67 *Ming shilu*, *Taizong shilu*, Yongle 8, Month 6, dingwei day (13 July 1410), juan 105.
- 68 Tsai, 170.
- 69 Cited in W. Franke, 375–428, 389.
- 70 W. Franke, 375–428, 392.
- 71 Tsai, 171.
- 72 Jin Youzi, “Bei zheng lu,” one juan. <http://www.guoxue123.com/other/gcdg/gcdg/020.htm>, retrieved 2012-11-30.
- 73 Jin Youzi, “Bei zheng lu.” <http://www.guoxue123.com/other/gcdg/gcdg/021.htm>, retrieved 2012-10-29.
- 74 Wang Zhaochun, *Zhoungguo huoqi shi*, 110.
- 75 On volley fire and the European military revolution, see Geoffrey Parker, *The Military Revolution: Military Intervention and the Rise of the West*. 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 20; Geoffrey Parker, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of Warfare: The Triumph of the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 391; Michael Roberts, cited in David Eltis, *The Military Revolution in Sixteenth-Century Europe* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1998), 8.
- 76 Wang Zhaochun *Zhongguo huoqi shi*, 109–10; Sun Laichen, “Military Technology Transfers from Ming China and the Emergence of Northern Mainland Southeast Asia (c. 1390–1527),” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 34.3 (2003),

495–517, 500.

- 77 See Tonio Andrade, *The Gunpowder Age: China, Military Innovation, and The Rise of the West in World History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), chapter 11.
- 78 Jin Youzi “Bei zheng lu.” <http://www.guoxue123.com/other/gcdg/gcdg/021.htm>, retrieved 2012-10-29.
- 79 Chase, *Firearms*, 44–5.
- 80 Wang Zhaochun *Zhongguo huoqi shi*, 110.
- 81 *Ming shilu*, *Taizong shilu*, juan 262, Yongle 21, Month 8, bingyin day (22 September 1423). Sinophone historians have interpreted this passage as indicating the use of volley fire. Wang Zhaochun, for example, writes, “The meaning of this is that when fighting, the shen ji qiangs and pao troops line up in front of the entire formation, and between them there must be a certain amount of space, so that they can load bullets and powder, and employ shooting by turns and in concert, to destroy the enemy advance guard. Once the enemy has been thrown into chaos, the rear densely arrayed cavalry troops together come forth in great vigor, striking forth with energy to topple mountains and turn over oceans.” Wang Zhaochun *Zhongguo huoqi shi*, 110.
- 82 Wang Zhaochun *Zhongguo huoqi shi*, 110.
- 83 Tsai, 173.
- 84 Tsai, 176–7.
- 85 See *Ming shi*, “Military Treatise I,” translated by Liew, Foon Ming.
- 86 The best English-language account of this episode is still Frederick W. Mote, “The T’u-Mu Incident of 1449.” In Frank Algerton Kierman and John King Fairbank, eds., *Chinese Ways in Warfare* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), 243–72.
- 87 Wang Zhaochun *Zhongguo huoqi shi*, 111.
- 88 Frederick W. Mote, 268.
- 89 Wang Zhaochun, *Zhongguo huoqi shi*, 89.
- 90 *Ming shilu*, cited in Wang Zhaochun, *Zhongguo huoqi shi*, 88.

CHAPTER 4

THE PARADOXICAL EFFECT OF AUTOCRACY

Collective deliberation in the Ming official merit-
evaluation system



Yang Wei

The essence of traditional Chinese imperial politics has been personnel management: to find the right person for the right posts within the government. This chapter examines the basic outlook and evolution of the Ming merit-evaluation system for the civil officials, and looks at how the system operated in times of crisis. It demonstrates that an ostensibly objective bureaucratic system could be heavily politicized and in fact become a vehicle for instability.

THE WAYS OF ENTERING OFFICIALDOM

The government of the Ming dynasty was dominated by civil service officials (*wenguan*), who numbered between 10,000 and 15,000. They were classified in nine grades, ranging from grade 1a (*zheng yi pin*) at the top to grade 9b at the bottom. Each grade was associated with distinctive salaries, privileges, duties, and prestige. There was also a parallel military official system with ranks from 1a through 7b, but military officials were also grouped into hereditary families and the examination system was not as thoroughly integrated into the selection and recruitment process. Herein I will focus exclusively on the civil bureaucracy. Early in the dynasty, civil officials were recruited in four major ways: 1) Recommendations; 2) promotion of lower-ranking clerks; 3) the National Academy; and 4) the civil service examinations. During the reign of Ming Taizu, when the dynasty was first created, recommendations (*jianju*) were frequently solicited. The Minister of Personnel (*libu shangshu*) was charged with the obligation to “investigate and visit” (*chafang*) the candidates for civil service post openings. The job of finding the right candidates was so important that he had to bring a notebook with him to note down the names of capable and virtuous persons, in preparation for recommendation to the throne at any time upon request.¹

Requests for recommendation were also made by Taizu (Zhu Yuanzhang) to existing officials in a broader range, and the recommendees were oftentimes promptly appointed to office; many were entrusted with very high posts. In 1364, before the establishment of Ming rule over the whole of China, an order was issued to the entire population under the regime’s rule to solicit recommendation of official candidates. It proclaims that any one over 25 years old is eligible to be considered.² Upon establishing the imperial capital in Nanjing, Taizu frequently issued edicts to request recommendations. A number of his major ministers including Li Shanchang, Song Lian, and Liu Ji, were recommended to Taizu, some of them self-recommended.

The anxious requests for recommendation, while indeed assisting Taizu in obtaining talented officials, also incurred criticism. Xie Jin, for instance, charged that these requests were “indiscriminate” and caused “chaos” and “nepotism.”³ Thereupon edicts were issued to punish those who “recommend improperly.”⁴ This highly personalized method of recruitment only served the special situation of the early Ming when the need for administrators was urgent and a formal system of personnel evaluation was absent. Partly due to the problems created by recommendation, the civil service examination system was revived to regularize recruitment of administrative personnel. In addition, during the early Ming, many higher officials were promoted from the candidate pool of lower-ranking clerks based on their tested performance in

various levels of the imperial administration.

The empire's school system was also utilized to provide candidates for the government.⁵ The National Academy and the Confucian Schools at all levels, from Prefecture (*fu*), Subprefecture (*zhou*), and County (*xian*) were instructed to recommend "tribute students" (*gongsheng*) to the imperial court. These students were examined by officials of the Hanlin Academy and then enrolled in the National Academy in the imperial capital. In early Ming, many of these "tribute students" became prominent figures in national politics. But by the middle of the fifteenth century fewer and fewer tribute students took crucial posts; they were overshadowed by another group of men, those who climbed up the ladder of administration through civil service examinations.⁶

Recruitment through examination gradually became the most important method of selecting officials for the Ming administration from the early fourteenth century. Conducted every three years, the examinations took place at varying levels. A candidate would first be tested by the local Education Intendants to be qualified for the degree of Bachelor (*xiucai*). Some students at the National Academy could obtain this degree there through examinations administered by the Academy. Those who passed the provincial examinations were rendered the title of Licentiates (*juren*), and were thereupon eligible for participation in a metropolitan examination (*huishi*) at the capital, the passers of which received the title of Presented Scholars (*jinsi*). Those Presented Scholars would reassemble for a final test, called the palace examination (*dianshi*), normally presided over by the Emperor, for being ranked for appointment to the various posts. The Presented Scholar and most Licentiate degree holders were guaranteed an office in the government, at least earlier in the Ming period. From the fifteenth century onwards, only those Presented Scholar degree holders were assured of bright civil service careers, though holders of the *juren* degree often still held prominent positions. Other methods of recruitment, including recommendation without taking examinations and tribute students from the National Academy, became increasingly less viable. The Licentiates who failed to pass the metropolitan examinations were occasionally appointed to unimportant offices in lower civil service hierarchy; sometimes they entered the National Academy for further study.

The metropolitan examinations took place ninety times during the Ming era. A total of over 24,000 men obtained the Presented Scholar title, with the average number of passers for every examination being less than 300. Higher ranking offices were only open to Presented Scholars, who constituted the highest echelon of candidate officials. Social prestige was accorded to this group of men and a strong exclusive

identity was formed within their ranks. Such was the honor of such a position in society that it became the preferred goal for families of all backgrounds, even if other paths to power and influence, such as the military, were more readily pursued. One's family could bask in the prestige of a single *jìnshì* degree holder for generations. Moreover, the difficulty of the examination process ensured that very few families produced more than three consecutive generations of high degree holders.⁷

Other systems of recruitment continued to co-exist with the civil service examination, such as the “protection of sons” (*yinzi*), especially during the early Ming period. This was a special honor given to the sons of officials to enter the officialdom as a privilege of serving the imperial court. However, gradually the “protected” sons had to go to the National Academy to be qualified for appointment to offices, most times lower-ranking offices. Furthermore, offices could be purchased by those who were able to afford them. This special approach to entering the administration was only available during financial or military crisis when the government was in urgent need of money. In that case those who contributed rice or horses to the state could enter the National Academy as special students. But compared to the official candidates who passed civil examinations, these alternative approaches never had lasting impact on the imperial bureaucracy, nor did their holders enjoy the same level of prestige. From the mid-Ming period, the administration was almost monopolized by the Presented Scholars, and only the civil examinations were considered as a “proper path” to the administration.

SELECTIONS AND APPOINTMENTS

Holding a civil service examination degree was only a prerequisite for the actual appointment to an office. Under the Ming, the power to select and appoint civil officials from a pool of candidates belonged to the Ministry of Personnel (*libu*). And the power to select and appoint military officers was held by the Ministry of War (*bingbu*). There were in fact military examinations, though relatively little is known about their frequency and content in comparison to the civil exams. Additionally, the Ming had a hereditary military system whereby designated families were required to provide one able-bodied male for service each generation in perpetuity.⁸ It should be noted that the Ministry of Personnel merely had the power to select mid- and lower-ranking officials within the administration. High-ranking officials had to be selected through a collective deliberation system, based on court debate, or through the personal discretion of the throne. The following

section deals with the Ministry of Personnel's selection of mid- and lower-ranking officials.

According to the *Minghuidian*, every year there were three types of selection: the General Selections, the Urgent Selections, and Selection for Far-away Regions.⁹ The Bureau of Appointment (*wenxuan si*) under the Ministry of Personnel was in charge of these jobs. The General Selections took place every two months, when the Bureau of Appointment reviewed the post openings and the list of eligible candidates from the civil examinations, from the National Academy, and from the cohort of existing officials who had adequately completed their nine-year tenure and were waiting to be promoted. The Ming administration had a full-fledged evaluation system to appraise existing officials, and those who served in the office for nine years generally received promotion according to the stipulations. At the General Selections, the Bureau matched the nature of openings and the qualities of candidates, and made initial decisions for the approval of the emperor. The meetings of selection, held at the Ministry of Personnel, were joined and supervised by Supervising Secretary (*Jishizhong*) in the Office of Scrutiny for Personnel (*like*).

Sometimes there were immediate needs for appointment; for instance, when there was a sudden promotion and demotion of officials, leaving an opening in the office, or when existing officials had to take a parent-mourning leave (*dingyou*), an urgent decision must be made to fill these vacant posts. In these cases Urgent Selections were made in a timely manner. Furthermore, since candidates were generally reluctant to travel to serve in frontier provinces like Yunnan, Guizhou, Guangxi, and Guangdong, a special selection process titled “selection for far-away regions” was regularly introduced to recruit officials from the tribute students and functionaries who otherwise would not have an opportunity to be considered for these posts.

These selection meetings were held at the main hall of the Ministry of Personnel. Because of the understandable pressure on the selection process, those officials in the Bureau of Appointment were expected to work independently and fairly. It is reported that one Minister of Personnel never returned home from his office, lest lobbyists would visit him at home. In the late fifteenth century, another Minister of Personnel named Li Yu had to erect a sign in the Ministry that said “Heaven Supervises” to warn everyone coming to his office of the dangers of nepotism.¹⁰

However, the selection processes were hardly considered fair by everyone. To prevent intervention by nepotism and private interests,

lotteries were introduced to the selections. In 1594, faced by charges of possible corruption and unfairness, Sun Piyang, the Minister of Personnel, instituted the lottery system in appointments. During the lottery, the post openings were written on bamboo slips hidden in a jar; candidates were to randomly pick up a slip, which determined the post he would be appointed to. The introduction of the lottery received split evaluations. Proponents praised it for its prevention of private interests, whereas the critics slammed its failure to consider the unique qualities of candidates and particular needs of posts. After all, some posts required special talents and random appointments may not have sufficed in such cases. For instance, a contemporaneous source reports that once, a weak, old candidate was chosen through the lottery to serve as a judge in Hangzhou, a city infamous for the quantity and difficulty of the local lawsuits. Aware of his inability to handle all the lawsuits, the candidate requested a switch that was rejected by Sun Piyang. With tears in his eyes, the old candidate embarked on his journey to Hangzhou. Sure enough, he was proven to be inadequate for the job, and he had to be replaced. Sun Piyang eventually approved the replacement, admitting the flaws of his lottery system. It should be noted that institutional innovations of this type occurred amid vehement factional struggles and complicated imperial politics.¹¹

In addition to selection by the Ministry of Personnel, recommendations were often encouraged as an alternative method of selecting candidates among existing officials for post openings. This approach was popular from the beginning of the dynasty through the fifteenth century. Despite stipulations to punish those who made “improper recommendations”, and the repeated imperial edict to require personal warranty for making recommendations, this system still prompted widespread nepotism. People innately tended to favor fellow compatriots from the same native place, old colleagues or subordinates, friends or allies from the same faction, or even relatives. Recommendations encouraged by the emperors aroused no public spirit, but oftentimes precipitated what is called “clientelism” by modern political scientists, which involves competing interest groups taking advantage of the system for their factional benefits.¹² The Ministry of Personnel in general opposed personal recommendations as violation of its assigned duty of selecting candidates.

MERIT-EVALUATIONS

Selection and appointment were only the beginning of a political career. Thereafter one was subject to continual, systematic merit-evaluations.

According to the Ming administrative stipulations, the new Presented Scholar degree holders and National Academy students might be required to “observe” the functioning of various government departments as interns. This internship normally lasted for one year or longer. After all, the education at the National Academy and the curriculum of the civil examinations highlighted Confucian classical learning, rather than the practical skills of statecraft, necessitating such internship. After the internship, many of them were assigned to probationary service or acting appointments, so as to have more hands-on training before the formal appointments (*shishou*).¹³

The Ming merit-evaluation consisted primarily of two parts: tenure reviews (*kaoman*) and periodical appraisals (*kaocha*). The former included regular reviews of administrative performance based on service terms, while the latter functioned as investigations of improper behavior or crimes of officials for possible demotion and dismissal. These two types of evaluation were conducted jointly by the Ministry of Personnel (especially the Bureau of Evaluations) and the Censorate (*duchayuan*).¹⁴

The tenure of a post was generally nine years. Every three years each official was to be rated by his superiors with comments recorded in the archives. There were three categories of ratings: meeting expectations (of the post) (*chenzhi*), adequate (*pingchang*), or inadequate (*bu chenzhi*). The nature of the posts was taken into consideration. Posts with a heavy workload (*fan*) received special treatment in the assessment compared to those with a light workload. After nine years of tenure, the officials receiving consistent positive reviews were promoted in rank, and those rated inadequate were demoted, or even dismissed from office. For the tenure review, one’s superior’s evaluations evidently played a significant role in the system.

Ming officials were also subject to periodical reviews called *kaocha* organized by the Ministry of Personnel and the Censorate to supplement the tenure review. Every three years, the provincial governments dispatched representatives to the central government to submit consolidated assessment reports of their employees reviewed by the court, called “outer evaluation” (*waicha*). A “capital evaluation” (*jingcha*) was conducted for officials serving in the imperial capital every six years. These periodical merit-evaluations focused on improper, or undesirable activities or qualities of officials. Eight types of officials were singled out for demotion, dismissal or even penalty, including “the greedy, the cruel, the frivolous and unstable, the inadequate, the overaged, the ill, and the weary, and the unscrupulous.” It was not uncommon for dozens of officials to be demoted or dismissed from office in each *kaocha*. However, statistics suggest that the evaluations of

provincial officials normally resulted in more penalties than their counterparts in the capital. For instance, the “capital evaluation” in 1488 only penalized five officials in the capital, whereas the “outer evaluation” five years later demoted and dismissed over 1,400 provincial officials, plus another over 1,100 local functionaries.¹⁵ This may suggest the power and connection of the capital officials to the offices in charge of merit-evaluations.

To prepare for the “outer evaluations” local county magistrates were required to report inadequate subordinates to their prefects, who in turn consolidated the information into their annual report to the provincial governments. Every three years the latter submitted an overall report to the central government to be reviewed at the “outer evaluations”. It is reported that the triennial “outer evaluations” were the moments when the representatives from provincial authorities had to appear to be humble and anxious. These local officials, most of them high-ranking officials of grade 4 and above, would remove their cap, stand outside the court, and listen anxiously to the reports of their misconduct.

The Capital Evaluations, beginning in 1436, were aimed at officials on duty in the capital. Officials in general were evaluated by their superiors, who were obligated to report those fitting any of the eight undesirable categories mentioned above. Higher ranking officials of grade 4 and above were exempted from the normal review procedures. They were allowed to submit a “self-evaluation” (*zicheng*); this gave the high-ranking officials a chance to admit their incompetence and request retirement. Later, the range of officials permitted to do self-evaluation extended to those serving in departments such as the Hanlin Academy, the Bureau of Imperial Ceremonies (*zhanshifu*), and the Imperial Hospital (*taiyiyuan*).¹⁶

The self-evaluation was considered a privilege for these officials. But it also caused abuse of the privilege: many officials would not expose their incompetency and misconduct. Thus in 1501, a suggestion was made to have censorial officials screening all officials in administration right after each round of Capital Evaluations. Gradually it became a routine that after each round of Capital Evaluations, the censorial officials submitted reports to impeach those inadequate officials who were “missed” in the evaluation. This was called “picking up the omitted” (*shiyi*). During the late Ming era, those officials targeted by this censorial surveillance seldom evaded the fate of demotion or dismissal. The punishments for those impeached fell into four categories: compulsory retirement, demotion, forced leave, and being stripped of academic degree and demoted to commoner status. Given the vital importance of the impeachment after “capital evaluation,” Ministers of Personnel found it

necessary to collect evidence to prepare for the impeachments. A system of confidential garnering intelligence emerged in the second half of the sixteenth century, in which the Minister of Personnel entrusted some censors to launch investigations using a confidential form of investigation called “the Investigation Form” (*fangdan*). The Investigation Forms later evolved into the opinion poll ballot for the purpose of personnel management (see the discussion below).

Throughout the Ming period, all officials were in theory subject to the surveillance of their colleagues and, most importantly, the censorial officials. The Ming censorial system was comprised of the Censorate where the censors monitored the daily functioning of the administration in general, and the Six Offices of Scrutiny, where the supervising secretaries watched the working of the Six Ministries in particular. In theory, any faults or offenses could be impeached by any official on duty; however, in practice it was the censorial officials who mainly exercised the duty of monitoring and impeachment. However, the power of the censorial officials was also limited, and they themselves were subject to the surveillance of their fellow colleagues and constrained by the term of their service, after which they would return to the regular body of officialdom.¹⁷

From the Wanli emperor’s reign (1573–1620), the Capital Evaluations followed by impeachments by the censors became a focal point of factional struggles, whereby every faction sought to control the “dominant opinions” (*gonglun*) and abused the censorial system to manipulate the impeachment of their political rivals. Since at each Capital Evaluation, those high-ranking officials were exempt and only needed to write a “self-evaluation,” censorial officials played an active role in impeaching and removing these high officials from office. The Ming merit-evaluations thus became an arena for the most vehement and bloody power struggles. Since the beginning of the seventeenth century, the major factions at the court including the famous Donglin circle and their rivals actively engaged in the merit-evaluations to attack their enemies and strengthen their dominance. Merit-evaluations thus become the key to understanding the political development and bureaucratic dysfunction of late Ming China.¹⁸

THE EVOLUTION OF MERIT-EVALUATIONS AND THE RISE OF MAJORITARIAN DISCOURSE

The imperial institutions established by the dynastic founder, Taizu, were meant to facilitate what is called “autocracy” in modern times.

According to the *Mingshilu* (Veritable Records of the Ming), the new system functioned as follows:

Our dynasty abolished the grand councillorship, and established the five military commanderies, the six ministries, the Censorate, the Office for Transmission, the Court of Judicial Review, and other offices.¹⁹ These departments divide and manage the civil affairs under Heaven. They are equal to one other in status, and would not overshadow one another. All affairs are up to the discretion of the imperial court.²⁰

The term “imperial court” here refers to the emperor. To centralize power, Taizu launched bloody purges against his ministers and permanently abolished the Grand Councillorship (*xiang*), in 1380.²¹ The abolition made the Ming administrative system distinctive from those of the previous dynasties, when the grand councilors or the chief ministers stood as leader for the bureaucracy. In addition, an elaborate censorial system was created to monitor the functioning of the government. The result of this institutional design was the devolution of power in the outer court with mutual checks and balances and the concentration of supreme power in the hands of the throne.²²

However, this autocratic system required tremendous diligence, competence, and fortitude on the part of the emperor to function as designed. When these conditions were not met, the diffusion of power into the bureaucracy could lead, rather ironically, to collective leadership, which indeed emerged during the late Ming.

The late Ming was marked by a rigorous momentum towards populism in the society. The drastic growth of population, the relative shrinkage of government size, rise of localism, and the upsurge of popular activism led to various social institutions and organizations, ranging from literati societies such as Fushe (Restoration Society) and the Jishe, charity groups, and waves of popular protests and activism, as discussed by Ying Zhang below.²³ Echoing these populist movements, there emerged a tendency towards collective leadership/decision-making in the imperial administration that thwarted the autocratic power. The term “popular opinion” or *gonglun* became catch words for the generations of scholar-officials in the late Ming.²⁴

This explains a distinctive system emergent in the fifteenth century to collectively deliberate on the selection and appointment of high-ranking officials. According to the *Ming shi*, the system worked as follows:

The appointments of Grand Secretaries and the Minister of Personnel were made either by Court Recommendation (*tingtui*) or by special imperial edict. Candidates for vice ministers and Chancellor of Imperial Academy (*jijiu*) were jointly recommended at court by the Ministry of Personnel and the officials of the third

ranks and above. . . . As to the provincial posts, only Supreme Commanders (*zongdu*) and Regional Inspectors (*xunfu*) were appointed through Court Recommendation participated commonly by all the Nine Ministers and presided over by the Minister of Personnel. Appointments of Provincial Administration Commissioners (*buzhengshi*) and Surveillance Commissioners (*anchashi*) were made through collective recommendation (*huiju*) participated by all the officials of the third ranks and above. 25

The Chinese term *huitui* (collective deliberation) is a short form of the phrase “*huiguan tuiju*”,²⁶ which literally denotes “to rally officials and to recommend collectively”. Ming sources concur that at the event of collective deliberation, the Nine Ministers, the Grand Secretaries, and the Supervising Secretaries for the Six Ministries (*liuke jishizhon*), the censors (*yushi*), and other relevant officials assembled for the meeting. Since the censorial officials entitled to an audience numbered in dozens, the meeting had to be held in a spacious palace hall. The censors played an important role, as they not only engaged in the discussion, but also had the right to veto proposals.²⁷ The emperor himself did not attend the meetings. The collective deliberation could last for hours with vehement debate. If the open discussion failed to conclude with a candidate list for the posts commonly agreed upon, then further meetings had to be scheduled, until a list of candidates was finalized. The list of names normally contained two finalists, one primary and the other an alternative.²⁸ The outcome, signed by all the attendees of meeting, was submitted to the throne for royal approval. According to sixteenth-century sources, collective deliberation was designed to make convenient the emperor’s appointments of high officials by garnering the consensus for the imperial reference. The emperor not only could veto the result of the collective deliberation by ordering another meeting, he could also issue a special imperial edict to appoint someone not on the list of names.²⁹ This imperial power was appropriated by powerful courtiers like Zhang Juzheng who tutored the young emperor Shenzhong (Wanli) in the 1570s, when collective deliberation meetings were conveniently cancelled and personnel decisions were made by Zhang. However, after Zhang’s death in 1582, heated disputes arose in the 1590s regarding the limits of the emperor’s power.

In 1591, Wanli called several prominent courtiers to his inner palace to announce the appointment of Zhao Zhigao, the Minister of Rites, as his chief Grand Secretary. This appointment was criticized by Lu Guangzu, the Minister of Personnel. Lu submitted a memorial slamming this imperial edict. He argued that the collective deliberation was a system created by the founding emperors of the dynasty. The emperor’s recent appointment that circumvented the collective deliberation was against the “established institution” and was thus unacceptable. In

addition, the way Wanli made appointments without open, fair debate in the court undermined the transparency of the decision-making procedure. Hence, it violated the principles of “fairness.”³⁰

However, there were no sources that approve the validity of Lu’s argument. On the contrary, many contemporaneous sources suggest that the collective deliberation was a rather new institution that emerged in the mid-fifteenth century, and the tradition co-existed with the emperor’s power for direct appointments without forming a consensus with the ministers.³¹ In other words, Lu Guangzu was “inventing” a tradition to limit the emperor’s power to directly appoint high officials without the consensus of the major ministers and censors. The “fairness” that Lu Guangzu endeavored to champion was a new concept in the Ming that entailed broadened political participation and greater transparency in political procedures.

Interestingly, faced with such a harsh critique, Wanli backed off and admitted the appointment by imperial edict “should not be a precedent.” “Let there be collective deliberation (*huitui*) in the future,” the emperor promised.³² Indeed, the collective deliberation was conducted for future high official appointments, coupled with the sporadic issuance of special imperial edicts to appoint high officials directly. In the next decades, Wanli would face many demands of this kind to subject high bureaucratic appointments to the consensus formed through collective deliberations of the ministers. Sometimes he was able to circumvent the system, but never without an arduous struggle, which eventually wore him down and had a deleterious effect on the operation of the bureaucracy as a whole.³³

Underneath the scholar-officials’ attempts to limit the emperor’s power for bureaucratic appointments was a rising concept of “public reasoning.” Lu Guangzu and his like-minded colleagues expressed their belief that the collective recommendation practices demonstrated the rationale of public reasoning, which should be favored over individual decision-making including that by the emperor himself. As Lu Guangzu put it:

[We must] rally publicly in a great hall, and discuss openly who are courageous and who are worthy. . . . Only in doing so can the imperial court have an institution that represents the greatest fairness/impartiality (*gong*) and the ultimate justice, and only in doing so can those recommended be honored and hence expected to exert themselves fully in their posts.³⁴

Disputes like this suggest a subtle but crucial change in the attitudes of the courtiers. Evidently this was a struggle over the right source of

political authority; should it come from the monarchy, or from the scholar-officials?³⁵ Underneath the dispute were competing political principles and intellectual premises. The proponents of “public reasoning” advocated open, collective deliberation based on the conviction that decisions stemmed therefrom not only outweighed individual opinions, but also served as a necessary calibration and rectification of individual opinion that is by itself isolated, biased, and incomplete.³⁶

According to the founding emperor’s institutional design, the emperor had the power to issue edicts to appoint high-ranking ministers. Despite the many precedents of the ruler’s ability to do so, a group of proponents of the idea of “public reasoning” firmly opposed such practice in the late Ming, urging the emperor to waive this power. Instead, they sought to confine the appointments to the decisions endorsed by the common judgment of the outer court.

Different from the above mechanisms of limiting imperial power, the collective method was rooted in a deep conviction in the validity of the common judgment by the literati-officials that outweighed any individual opinion, including that of the throne. Broader inclusion of opinions, political transparency, and the necessity of public reasoning in the process of policymaking had been the focal point of the disputes on *huitui*. At the same time, during the same period, the notion of “popular opinion” also gained centrality in the imperial politics, pushing more institutional innovations. The use of opinion poll questionnaires or the *fangdan* became popular during the late Ming, accompanying the rise of collective leadership related to collective deliberation. The Chinese term, *fangdan*, in general refers to investigation forms, questionnaires, or ballots employed in the Ming administration. These forms were sent to the various offices for information collection, opinion polling, or voting, to make decisions relating to personnel management and other administrative affairs.

The main method for evaluating officials under the Ming, as mentioned above, was one’s superior’s appraisal reports sent to the Ministry of Personnel. However, during the 1590s, reforms were carried out to base merit-evaluation on the perceived “popular opinion” among the scholar-officials. For example, in 1595, Sun Piyang, the Minister of Personnel, organized a *fangdan* survey by sending out these “investigation forms” to the various offices for a new round of merit-evaluation of provincial officials. When the appraisal was completed, Sun Piyang suggested the dismissal of an official from Zhejiang named Ding Cilu. What made this dismissal unusual was the criterion Sun employed in his judgment. He based the decision primarily on the *fangdan* review

of Ding Cilu which included a high number of negative comments, many of them charges of various crimes and corruption. When the *fangdan* were submitted to Wanli, the ruler ordered Ding Cilu to be thrown into the decree prison (*zhaoyu*). Ding was later exiled to the frontier.³⁷

This stirred up a heated controversy, for this was clearly an unprecedented break from the existing institution of merit-evaluation. Zhao Zhigao, the Grand Secretary appointed by special imperial edict without collective deliberation memorialized Wanli to argue that: “Although the Ministry of Personnel had previously used *fangdan* to footnote merit-evaluation, the opinion poll results had never been submitted to the emperor. . . . Never before have these anonymous *fangdan* been depended on as the basis for judging one’s crime.”³⁸ Zhao Zhigao was worried about the change Sun Piyang initiated. *Fangdan*, the mere “footnote” of previous merit appraisal now became the “basis for judgment” that the emperor had to review and accept. Zhao saw no validity in these anonymous comments.

Sun Piyang also memorialized the throne with a rebuttal. He argues that evaluation of officials is quite different from judicial verdict of a crime that requires solid evidence. The evaluation of officials considers primarily the “controversial consequences” as revealed by the collective observation given in *fangdan*. To Sun, the overwhelming judgment of one being “unscrupulous” provides sufficient ground for dismissal and demotion.³⁹ It should be noted that the central reason for Sun’s suggestion of dismissal was precisely the extraordinary number of negative comments. As acknowledged by Zhao Zhigao: “Sun Piyang dismissed Ding Cilu for the high number of [bad] *fangdan* reviews he got. This shows Sun Piyang’s mind-and-heart of fairness (*gongxin*).”⁴⁰ Sun Piyang was introducing a new method of appraising imperial officials in the year of 1595, based on the counting of anonymous evaluative observations from the officialdom—a break from the existing routine of appraisal based on the reviews by the office head. A contemporary also documents the crucial change this reform brought to the officialdom. “No one reviewed *fangdan*” until 1595 when Sun Piyang reformed it as the primary tool of evaluation for dismissal.⁴¹

It is not clear whether the criminal charges against Ding Cilu were true or not. Sources such as *Mingshi jishi benmo* and *Donglin shimo* report that Ding’s corruption was verified after interrogation,⁴² while some other literati believed the crimes asserted in *fangdan* never happened.⁴³ Relevant to our discussion is the conflicting principles for evaluating officials. As Sun Piyang explains, the emperor’s punishment of Ding may have been excessive, but Ding at least deserved dismissal owing to the overwhelmingly negative peer review he received.⁴⁴ Such

peer review requires no solid evidence as judicial verdict; rather, it reflects a collective judgment of the majority of literati-officials, demonstrated in the number of denunciative *fangdan*. This quantifiable means of using *fangdan* was innovated to capture popular opinion as the dominant criterion of the official merit appraisal.

The use of *fangdan* was popularized throughout the rest of the Waili reign. For instance, Sun Piyang won the reform again in 1610 when he described the principle of his merit-evaluation as follows: “Together with our colleagues and other ministers, we reviewed and calculated the *fangdan* to differentiate the weights without any bias and oversight.”⁴⁵ As one contemporary report testified, the decision in the 1610 merit appraisal was precisely because some officials received “unanimously bad *fangdan*.” This criterion was confirmed by the co-organizer of the appraisal, named Tang Zhaojing, the censor of the Henan Censorial Region, who stated that “the personnel evaluation and management were entirely based on the review of *fangdan*.”⁴⁶

This suggests a shift from the superiors’ formal merit comments to the collective peer review as the main criterion of merit-evaluation. The existing bureaucratic routine was marginalized, giving way to popular opinion of the majority of scholar-officials. According to a late Ming report, the new method of selection of official candidates was as follows: “*Fangdan* are sent to the main ministers and various offices; one’s ranking depends on the number of good and bad [feedback]. Even the minister of personnel is unable to dominate its result.”⁴⁷ The purpose of the circulation of *fangdan* was to solicit and substantiate the popular opinion of the officialdom, as the compilers of *Ming shi* conclude:

The *fangdan* was that by which the minister of personnel, at the time of merit appraisal, sought *gonglun* to determine who were worthy or not. Ministers, through the *fangdan*, were able to write down what they heard and submit it to the organizer of the appraisal.⁴⁸

Just like the rise of the collective deliberation, the use of *fangdan* opinion polls suggests the rise of a majoritarian discourse. These institutional innovations and reforms reshaped the organizational dimension of the Ming administration, promoting broadened inclusion of opinions, transparency, and the dominance of shared opinions amongst the literati-officials reified through a quantifiable approach against the autocratic authority.

The reforms centered on collective deliberation and *fangdan* to facilitate popular opinion continued throughout the Wanli and Tianqi reigns, giving rise to vehement disputes and factional struggles. The

circles of self-righteous scholar-officials, for instance, the Donglin faction, and their rivals competed with one another to dominate the majoritarian discourse in attempts to influence or manipulate the emperor. Through these power struggles and political disputes, imperial authority was weakened during the late Wanli and Tianqi reigns.

However, all these majoritarian tendencies led to a further clash between the throne and the bureaucracy during the Chongzhen reign. The Chongzhen emperor sought to recover the autocratic power that the early-Ming institutional design was intended to serve. He actively limited the collective deliberation and criticized the use of *fangdan* as an instrument to obtaining popular opinion, confronting ruthlessly with the outer court. He also increasingly relied upon eunuchs to enact the imperial will, much to the dismay of his civil officials. Chongzhen's attempts to strengthen imperial authority clashed, rather tragically, with the rising majoritarian movement of the Ming administration. Although the emperor fired dozens of his major ministers, he found himself impotent to lead the administration in the way his ancestors had done. Chief Grand Secretaries were replaced at the rate of more than one per year. Amid the battles between the emperor and the scholar-officials seeking the rule of popular opinion, the Ming dynasty tumbled and eventually fell to the catastrophes of peasant rebellion and foreign aggression.

NOTES

- 1 Charles Hucker, "Governmental Organization of the Ming Dynasty," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 21 (1958): 1–66. Pan Shuxin, *Mingdai wenguan quanxuan zhidu yanjiu* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2005). Guan Wenfa and Yan Guangwen, *Mingdai zhengzhi zhidu yanjiu* (Beijing: shehui kexue chubanshe, 1995).
- 2 Zhang Tingyu et al., *Ming shi* (Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1980), repr. 1994, 1675–93.
- 3 *Ming shi*, 4115–23.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 On the community school system, see Sarah Schneewind, *Community Schools and the State in Ming China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006).
- 6 *Ming shi*, 1675–85.
- 7 Charles Hucker, "Governmental Organization of the Ming Dynasty," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 21 (1958), 1–66.
- 8 For a recent study of the social dimensions of the hereditary military system, see Michael Szonyi, *The Art of Being Governed: Everyday Politics in Late Imperial China* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).
- 9 *Da Ming huidian* (Taipei: Guofen chubanshe, 1963).
- 10 *Ming shi*, 4369–70.

- 11 See *Ming shi* 5900–905. See also Shen Defu, *Wanli yehuo bian*, in *Yuanming shiliao biji congkan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959).
- 12 Francis Fukuyama, *The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011).
- 13 *Ming shi*, 1675–93.
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 See the section on *waiguan kaocha* in Shen Defu.
- 16 *Ming shi*, 1723–43.
- 17 Charles Hucker, *The Censorial System of Ming China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1966).
- 18 These struggles are discussed in much detail in John W. Dardess, *Blood and History in China: The Donglin Faction and its Repression, 1621–1627* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002).
- 19 For the English translations of the Ming offices and official titles, I follow Charles Hucker, “An Index of Terms and Titles in the Governmental Organization of the Ming Dynasty,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 23 (1960/61), 127–51. Also see Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles*.
- 20 Yao Guangxiao et al., comps., *Mingshilu* 144 vols, (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan shiyusuo, 1966). *Taizu shilu*, 3478. In this study, I follow the proofread and corrections of *Mingshilu* in this 1966 shiyusuo edition.
- 21 For the abolishment of the grand councillorship, see Denis Twitchett and Frederick W. Mote, eds. *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 7: *The Ming Dynasty 1368–1644, Part 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 139–48, hereafter *CHC* 7. For Zhu Yuanzhang rather bloody purges of his ministers were an institutional design to centralize power in imperial authority. See, for example, John D. Langlois, Jr., “The Hung-wu Reign”, in *CHC* 7, 107–181. Also see Fu Zhengyuan, *Autocratic Tradition and Chinese Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). Fu traces the culmination of autocracy in Maoist era to the reign of Zhu Yuanzhang in the early Ming. Similar comparison can also be found in Anita M. Andrew and John A. Rapp, *Autocracy and China’s Rebel Founding Emperors: Comparing Chairman Mao and Ming Taizu* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000). For Zhu Yuanzhang’s expanding legislation of aspects of social life, see Edward L. Farmer, *Zhu Yuanzhang and Early Ming Legislation: The Reordering of Chinese Society Following the Era of Mongol Rule* (Leiden: Brill, 1995). See also Guan Wenfa, and Yan Guangwen, *Mingdai zhengzhi zhidu yanjiu*, 1–48.
- 22 Hucker, *Censorial System*, 28–49. For the division of power and check and balance featuring the Ming autocratic system, see also *Zhongguo tongshi*, edited by Fan Wenlan and Cai Meibiao (Beijing: renmin chubanshe, 1995). Bai Gang, ed., *Zhongguo zhengzhi zhidu tongshi*, vol. 9 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1996), 22–32; 70–95, and 471–95.
- 23 Joanna H. Smith, *The Art of Doing Good: Charity In Late Ming China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009). Susumu Fuma, “Late Ming Urban Reform and the Popular Uprising in Hangzhou,” in Linda Cooke Johnson, ed., *Cities of Jiangnan in Late Imperial China* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), 47–80. Timothy Brook, *Praying for Power: Buddhism and the Formation of Gentry Society in Late-Ming China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993). Martin Heijdra, “The Socio-Economic Development of Rural China during the Ming,” in Denis Twitchett and Frederick W. Mote (eds.), *The Cambridge History of China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998),

- 552–4. Peter Bol, “Neo-Confucianism and Local Society, Twelfth to Sixteenth Century: A Case Study,” in Paul Jakov Smith and Richard von Glahn, eds., *The Song-Yuan-Ming Transition in Chinese History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003), 241–83.
- 24 Yang Wei, “Popular Opinion and Public Reasoning: Intellectual Changes and Institutional Innovations in Late Ming China (1580–1660),” (Ph.D. Diss., Harvard University, 2014).
- 25 *Ming shi*, 1716. The same account can also be found in earlier *Mingshilu*, *Shenzong shilu*, 2872.
- 26 The term *huitui* appears in *Mingshilu* with high frequency, 343 times; and the phrase *huiguan tuiju* appears in *Mingshilu* 23 times. In all these mentions, the two terms are interchangeable.
- 27 There are many examples in Ming sources about the censor’s right to veto. One of them comes from *Ming shi*, 6252.
- 28 The number of candidates on the final list submitted to the emperor varied depending on the context. Normally the number was 2–3, which limited the emperor’s power to choose. There was a case where only one single candidate was presented to the throne. Shen Defu provides one story in the Wanli reign when there was only one single candidate recommended. See Shen Defu, *Wanli yehuobian*, 290.
- 29 See Xu Xueju, *Guochao dianhui* (1621–27 version). *Passim*.
- 30 This memorial is contained in Chen Zilong, *Ming jingshi wenbian*. For a facsimile reprint of the text, see Chen Zilong ed. *Ming jingshi wenbian*. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1962), 4058a–4059a. Accounts of Lu Guangzu’s confrontation with the emperor is recorded in a variety of original sources. See for example *Mingshilu*, *Shenzong shilu*, 4451. See also Shen Defu, *Wanli yehuo bian*, 243. See also *Mingshilu*, *Shenzong Shilu*, 4451.
- 31 See Li Xian, *Tianshun rilu*, in Deng Shilong, ed., *Guochao diangu* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1993), 1166.
- 32 See Chen Zilong, ed., *Ming jingshi wenbian*, 4059a. See also *Mingshilu*, *Shenzong shilu*, 4471.
- 33 For an account of the imperial authority’s clash with gentry power during the late Ming, see Harry Miller, *State versus Gentry in Late Ming Dynasty China, 1572–1644* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
- 34 This memorial is contained in Chen Zilong, 4058a–4059a. Accounts of Lu Guangzu’s confrontation with the emperor is recorded in a variety of original sources. See for example *Mingshilu*, *Shenzong shilu*, 4451. See also Shen Defu, *Wanli yehuo bian*, 243. See also *Mingshilu*, *Shenzong Shilu*, 4451.
- 35 See Miller, *State versus Gentry*.
- 36 See Yang Wei, *Popular Opinion and Public Reasoning*.
- 37 The records of this event are included in various sources. See, for example, Gu Yingtai, *Ming shi jishi benmo* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), 1028. *Ming shi*, 6006.
- 38 *Shenzong shilu*, 5364.
- 39 *Shenzong shilu*, 5364.
- 40 *Shenzong shilu*, 5395.
- 41 See also Shen Defu, *Wanli yehuo bian*, 301.
- 42 Note that both *Mingshi jishi benmo* and *Donglin shimo* are marked by a pro-

Donglin undertone. The narrations of this event in various Ming sources have been tinted with their authors' attitudes toward the power struggles. See Gu Yingtai, *Mingshi jishi benmo*, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), 1028. For a more balanced account of this event, see *Ming shi*, 6006–7.

- 43 For example, a late-Ming observer named Yao Shilin was in sympathy to Ding Cilu. See Yao Shilin, *Jianzhibian* (Beijing: Congshu jicheng chubian,, 1985), 92–3. See also Yu Shenxing, *Gushan bichen* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), 54.
- 44 *Shenzong shilu*, 5364.
- 45 *Shenzong shilu*, 9091.
- 46 *Shenzong shilu*, 9105.
- 47 Shen Defu, *Wanli yehuobian*, 291.
- 48 *Ming shi*, 6006.

CHAPTER 5

DESERTS AND ISLANDS

The politics of border control, 1547–49



Roland L. Higgins

Border control and protection were major concerns of the early modern Eurasian empires emerging after the collapse of the Mongol imperium in Asia. From the East China Sea to the Caspian Sea, officials of the Ming empire, as well as of the Romanov, Ottoman, Safavid, and Moghul empires, along with the successor Qing empire in China, all shared similar preoccupations with establishing, maintaining, and defending territorial boundaries from external enemies' encroachments and strikes into the heartlands. In general, these empires made the boundary with central Asia a top strategic priority, since nomadic tribes and coalitions of tribes might once again pose an existential threat, as the Mongols under Chinggis Khan and his descendants had done in the thirteenth century.¹

THE IMPORTANCE OF BORDERS AND SECURITY

Borders are—then and now—very complex phenomena, and Ming borders were no exception. Borders serve a variety of often-contradictory functions. They can act as both gateways and as barriers, zones of opportunity and of conflict. They demarcate territory to defend, limit who enters and exits, and separate insiders from outsiders. Their security is an important focus of governance and the exercise of power. An inability to adequately regulate cross-border activity can reveal a government in disarray, which in turn invites more external threats and dangers.²

We will focus here on two of the most important border regions of Ming China in a period of rising instability. Each of the two borders was approximately 1,500 miles in length: the northern border facing the Mongolian plateau, often also called from the viewpoint of Beijing the northwestern border, and the southeastern littoral from approximately the Shandong peninsula to eastern Guangdong. By the 1540s, border officials serving in those regions had reported enough danger from mounting external threats to urge, at some political risk, reversing the government's long-standing defensive posture on the two borders. For nearly a century, the government had relied in the north on the Great Wall to define the boundary and to deter attack. After centuries of neglect, it was gradually being rebuilt at great cost by the Ming and strengthened as a platform for military surveillance and an early warning system should renewed Mongol attacks occur. For this purpose, the fortifications included an elaborate system of soldier garrisons, watchtowers, and beacon towers that functioned to protect strategic points, to signal alarms, and to initiate military responses. However, it was not a uniform structure in all places and there were many vulnerabilities and weaknesses. In the southeast, shorelines were similarly dotted with coastal defense watchtowers and military garrisons, but without a comparable wall or seawall.³ Both systems were designed largely to watch for and to react to situations of the enemy's creation, often leaving the defenders at a disadvantage since attackers were free to select time and place. What this new crop of officials proposed was a return to a more assertive, even aggressive campaign to proactively challenge and deny the enemy vital staging areas for launching surprise attacks across the borders.⁴

In the north, that staging area was commonly the Ordos; in the southeast it was the offshore islands. China lacked mounted and naval forces adequate to either forestall attacks from these enemy havens or to pursue attackers after the fact. As we will see, frontier officials were

often relocated from one border region to another. Thus they could share perspectives as they became acquainted with the commonalities and frustrations of fending off highly mobile attackers. Now, in 1547, certain influential civil officials were developing a strategy to abandon the passive and deteriorating status quo and to win approval for their desire to revert to the dynasty's earlier "forward policy" designed to drive enemies away from the borders, a militarily much more proactive posture.⁵

OFFICIALS AND POLICIES

To explore this development, we focus on two Ming Dynasty frontier officials of the mid-sixteenth century. The first, named Zeng Xian (1499–1548, *jinsshi* 1529) was assigned to defend the northern frontier; the other, named Zhu Wan (1494–1550, *jinsshi* 1521) was placed in charge of coastal defense (*haifang*).⁶ In their capacities as regional Grand Coordinators (*xunfu*),⁷ these two experienced, high-ranking officials deemed it necessary for the security of their respective border regions to extend governmental control outward. In the northwest, Zeng advocated seizure of the Ordos desert well beyond the fixed boundary line of the Great Wall, while in the southeast, Zhu pushed for attacking and eliminating pirate lairs in the outlying islands beyond the shorelines of Zhejiang and Fujian. In both cases, the basic goal was the same: to restore imperial control and surveillance of strategic zones often occupied by raiders and plunderers and employed as staging areas for mounting assaults on towns and cities across Ming borders. In the northeast there were Mongol raiders (*taokou*) and in the southeast there were pirate raiders (*haikou* or *wokou* in Ming texts). Emergencies associated with both had been steadily on the increase since the latter half of the fifteenth century for the Mongols and the 1520s for coastal disturbances.⁸

It is worth noting that the aim of these two border officials was to "restore" imperial control, because in fact both strategic sectors had been subject to stronger military control earlier in the Ming. It was the Hongwu Emperor, 1368–98, who first positioned his nine strategic defense posts across Inner Mongolia from the Liaodong Peninsula to the Ordos region; then, after the time the Yongle Emperor, 1403–24, personally led five campaigns deep into Mongol territory, the Ming military presence in the north steadily diminished and was basically abandoned after the Tumu incident of 1449.⁹ Similarly in the southeast, the Ming navy, which used to patrol and protect the coast, declined after the cessation of the voyages of Zheng He and weakened even more after

the reign of Xuande, r. 1426–35 (more on this below).¹⁰

Therefore, after almost a century of neglect, border conditions had gradually but radically changed. By the early sixteenth century, both borders had become more open to unsupervised foreign contact and exchange of goods. Both frontiers now included a significant expansion of foreign trade in private hands. Informal markets appeared along both borders, even as Mongols and Japanese among others continued to press for more tribute trade (which itself had become increasingly difficult to regulate). Meanwhile, on the Chinese side, local authorities, prominent families, and some eunuch-officials openly colluded with merchants to profit from the expansion of private foreign trade, which nevertheless was still illicit under Ming law.¹¹ Ming society in the first half of the sixteenth century was undergoing a profound transformation. Ming China was more commercialized and productive than ever, and this attracted foreign traders seeking such valuable commodities as silks, porcelains, tea, ironwork, and copper, if not through tribute-trade, than through illicit trade. Border officials struggled with the contradictions of supposedly enforcing laws that were ill suited to changing realities.¹²

As the private foreign trade and the open flaunting of Ming laws and regulations continued, border defenses weakened dramatically. The relaxation of border control by local authorities contributed in turn to further lawlessness in the form of smuggling, banditry, plundering raids, reprisals and rampages due to conflicts over trade, tribute, and other matters. In the early sixteenth century, border security had so deteriorated that some central government officials became alarmed at the rise in violence and lawlessness. The two Grand Coordinators began to recommend a more aggressive approach with a higher degree of central government intervention requiring enough resources to restore order on the two peripheries.¹³ However, acquiring a central government endorsement from a politically fragmented Ming Court was an uncertain proposition. Contentious controversies could not be resolved easily. The emperor's shifting views might lead to fatal consequences for some and might leave open the question of the best way to secure the borders.

DESERTS AND ISLANDS

Before proceeding with how these cases fared, let us consider momentarily what the two borders had in common and how they were linked politically and militarily.

To the casual observer, the Ordos and the southeast coast are very

distinct regions; the one made up mostly of desert with only a small proportion of fertile land frequented by pastoralists and oasis seekers, while the other consisted of relatively unproductive offshore islands of varying size that often contained hidden coves and protected harbors frequented by fishermen, smugglers, and pirates.¹⁴ It is interesting that both the vast ocean and the steppes facilitated an enemy's escape from Chinese authorities. Furthermore, by the mid-sixteenth century the political and economic conditions in the two regions had become remarkably similar. Both had become active zones of unregulated trade as well as of continuing or growing lawlessness, conflict, and periodic violence in the form of plundering raids and reprisals. The latter were usually linked to disagreements over trade and tribute, either because the tribute and trading opportunities were too restricted and infrequent, or because outsiders deemed the terms of trade itself unfavorable and unfair.

As for the two border regions, in the second half of the fifteenth century, after the more dynamic, cosmopolitan years of the Yongle era had faded from memory, both borders became more strictly controlled. The conservative Ming bureaucracy ended overseas expeditions, curbed foreign trade, curtailed the tribute system, restricted foreign contact, and eventually drew back the northern borders of the empire to the line of a reconstructed Great Wall. Still, by the early sixteenth century, the northern border had long ceased to be an elastic frontier expanding and contracting with each new military expedition or campaign, as had been the case earlier in the dynasty.¹⁵ Instead, with the Ming Great Wall's reconstruction, the barrier was creating a fixed, static and inflexible defensive line, though not an impenetrable one, that many later critics subsequently used to symbolize late Ming culture as introverted, parochial, wary of outsiders—even xenophobic, and generally stifling of creativity.¹⁶ By 1500, the northern border was more or less the line of the Ming Great Wall (not yet finished) delineating the ecological boundary between settled agriculturists, who did not require horses for conveyance, and pastoral-nomadic peoples who did.

Similarly in the southeast, the de facto border was where the shoreline and ocean met. This line in fact demarcated another ecological boundary separating the settled agriculturalists that did not need seaworthy craft for conveyance and those who frequented the islands and oceans beyond where conveyance by boat or ship was an absolute necessity for maintaining their livelihoods. However, the Ming military was notoriously short of horses, which necessitated trade with their primary supplier, the Mongols. As for the maritime situation, the dynasty-long ban on building ocean-going vessels, completely relaxed under the Yongle Emperor, was restored thereafter. Even though the Ming navy

disbanded and largely disappeared, plenty of smaller boats remained available for fishermen, merchants and pirates. Maritime Chinese were not dependent on outsiders for their modes of conveyance, due to the maintenance of an active, native shipbuilding tradition, which, of course continued quite openly throughout the Ming along the inland waterways and ports.¹⁷

DANGERS AND RISKS

Nevertheless, while there were growing similarities in the nature and causes of border disturbances as well as in the decline of military effectiveness in the two border regions, there is no doubt that the threat posed by the Mongols in the north was by far the greater danger. The Ming state was created with a fervent determination to prevent another conquest like that of the Mongol Yuan (1279–1368). By contrast, coastal disturbances were often considered more of a nuisance than a threat to the dynasty's survival. Yet the weakened defenses there were proving inadequate to control increasingly aggressive and violent behavior on the part of traders and plunderers alike. Border insecurity not only threatened social stability but also undermined governmental authority. If left unattended, the deteriorating situation might become a full-scale crisis.

The dilemma for civilian border officials like Zeng and Zhu, who had been placed in the role of regional Grand Coordinators, was how to restore governmental authority, quell disturbances, and curtail trans-border violence in the absence of dependable local military support and active resistance to government intrusion in local affairs on the periphery. The challenges the two officials faced were remarkably similar. The situations were complicated, defied easy solutions, and were accompanied by considerable risk for their careers and even their lives.¹⁸

One of the greatest risks Zhu and Zeng faced was upsetting established trading relationships involving local Chinese and foreign merchants who were often backed by local officials and prominent families. All these groups were profiting one way or another, in whole or in part, from the uncontrolled traffic across the borders. After years of relative freedom to engage in illicit activity, local trading interests were not eager to see the re-establishment of central government surveillance and control. If, for example, a new Grand Coordinator possessed too much reforming zeal, he might encounter noncooperation and stiff resistance, and, if the local defenders of the status quo were well-connected at court, they could create a great deal of trouble. As it turned out, by this time, the status quo had powerful defenders. The dilemma

of what to do about illicit but entrenched foreign trade was an inescapable problem both Grand Coordinators had to face. Any effort to re-establish a credible government presence in the two border regions would have to confront two thorny issues: cross-border trade had become a fact of life, and not all raids were about plunder.

As scholars have pointed out, violent border disturbances were often expressions of frustration with the circumstances of trade, its risks and dangers, its infrequency and restrictions, as well as with the relative disadvantages the foreign trader faced in the Chinese marketplace. If the foreign traders did not like the terms of trade or felt cheated, local Chinese merchants could always call on local authorities to provide enforcement or protection. This left the outsider few options besides seizing by force what could not be obtained by trade. Furthermore, from a military point of view, the laxity of local officials regarding border security seriously compromised surveillance and weakened deterrence. Strategically sensitive border crossings were more open than ever to spies collecting intelligence for pirate raiders or Mongol leaders. Porous borders gave the raiders plenty of opportunity to collect sensitive information and to select their targets, making the Grand Coordinator's job that much more difficult.

These were the types of problems that existed on both borders by the mid-sixteenth-century. They had not been systematically addressed in either region for at least three generations.

What is not often noted is that Zhu Wan's campaign in the late 1540s to eliminate insular staging areas for pirate raids in Zhejiang and Fujian paralleled Zeng Xian's strategy to eliminate staging areas for Mongol raids by seizing control of the Ordos region. Each one was pursuing a proactive forward policy for their respective border region. Both officials in their assigned capacities came to similar conclusions once they had investigated local conditions, as I will show below.

ZHU WAN, COASTAL DEFENSE GRAND COORDINATOR

I first encountered Zhu Wan, and later Zeng Xian, while conducting research on the origins of the pirate raids of the 1550s.¹⁹ My work soon focused on Zhu Wan's central role as the first Grand Coordinator for coastal defense and his campaign against piracy and smuggling in Zhejiang and Fujian from 1547 until his death in 1549. When studying the background of Zhu's appointment to the post, I was surprised to

discover the important role played by Xia Yan (1482–1548, *jinshi* 1517) well before he became Chief Grand Secretary later in the Jiajing reign. Xia Yan was an early advocate of improving government control of coastal defense, and it was he who eventually proposed and defined the Grand Coordinator position Zhu Wan came to hold. It is important to understand the significance of this administrative innovation.²⁰

The gradual, but increasingly frequent appointment of senior civil officials to be Grand Coordinators was an institutional innovation of the early Xuande reign. At first, the position generally functioned as a sort of temporary governorship meant to tighten coordination of a province's three main offices (*sansi*): surveillance, administration, and the regional military commission (*anchasi*, *buzhengsi*, *duzhihui shisi*) during crises. By the 1440s the patrolling and pacifying duties (*xunfu*) became foremost and Grand Coordinators were soon appointed to all the northern border provinces from Liaodong to Gansu.²¹ In general, a Grand Coordinator:

was a special deputation of authority and responsibility to officials concurrently holding a regular appointment in the central government. Such officials were usually vice-ministers in the six ministries, particularly the Ministry of War. Later they were given nominal titles as senior censorial officials. In addition, the Grand Coordinator was designated concurrent superintendent of military affairs or concurrent associate in military affairs (*jian tidu junwu* or *canli junwu*). This became more common when military affairs grew increasingly important for the administration and marked the growth of civilian control over military affairs as the military organization itself deteriorated.²²

Thus, in the latter half of the Ming, civil officials of high rank became increasingly responsible for all aspects of military affairs, both internally and along the borders. It must be pointed out, however, that these positions developed because of the weakening of military leadership since the first half of the Ming but did not forestall the fact that, in general, Ming Emperors distrusted potential threats to their authority from any source, but especially that posed by the accumulation of too much military power by generals in the early Ming period, and by civilian Grand Coordinators and Supreme Commanders in the late Ming.²³ Thus, the latter positions were not only temporary ones, but full of risk for those who occupied them. They would certainly incur imperial displeasure when they were unsuccessful but might incur even worse consequences if they were too successful or were perceived as a potential threat.²⁴ The experiences of both Zeng Xian and Zhu Wan are interesting case studies of what could go wrong for the occupants of these otherwise powerful positions.

Although born into an artisan family, Zhu Wan received a Confucian

education from his father, who, having once served as an instructor in Zhejiang, taught his son the classics and history.²⁵ Earning the *jinshi* degree in 1521, at about age 27, Zhu moved almost immediately to work in the provinces, thus sparing him entanglement in the tumultuous ritual controversy in the capital that ruined so many officials' careers. In his third year of service, Zhu became Vice Director, rank 5b, in the Zhejiang Bureau of the Nanjing Ministry of Justice. By 1529, he had become the Director of the same Bureau, rank 5a. After less than a year in the Bureau of Operations of the Nanjing Ministry of War, Zhu was transferred to the Evaluations Bureau in the Nanjing Ministry of Personnel. Over the next two years while serving in the Jiangxi Administration Office as an Assistant Commissioner, rank 4b, Zhu enforced labor service requirements in a district where compliance was lax. In 1536, when he became Vice Commissioner, rank 4a, of the Sichuan Surveillance Office, he took charge of military defense in two districts where native tribes had been raiding. There, Zhu launched a successful ambush, pacified the tribes, and improved the provisioning of border guards. The same year he also quelled bandits in another district, for which he was praised by superiors and rewarded with a quantity of silver and silk.

After observing three-years of mourning for his mother, Zhu resumed activity and was promoted, rank 3b, to be Vice Commissioner in the Administration Office of Shandong. The year was 1541, the same year that Zeng Xian became an Assistant Censor-in-Chief and Grand Coordinator of the same province.²⁶ So, during that time, we can safely assume that the two men, whose future fates would be forever linked, definitely crossed paths, even if it was not the first or only time in their careers.²⁷ In Shandong, Zhu recommended ending the practice of sending Shandong troops off to serve in faraway frontier locations and got them returned to participate in local defense, which was less of a hardship.

In 1543 Zhu left Shandong for Yunnan's Surveillance Office, rank 3a, but returned the next year to his former Office in Shandong as its Commissioner, promoted to rank 2b. In 1545, he departed for Guangdong to serve in the same capacity. The next year he was dispatched to become Grand Coordinator of Nangan (southern Jiangxi) with the title of Vice Censor-in-Chief. The post included oversight of military affairs in southern Fujian as well.²⁸ This was the path by which Zhu Wan came to his final, most challenging and difficult position.

In July of 1547, Zhu was appointed to the new position of Zhejiang Grand Coordinator with concurrent responsibility for military affairs in coastal Fujian, where piracy was on the rise. Secondarily, because

miners-turned-bandits in southwest Zhejiang were also disturbing the peace, he was assigned to deal with them simultaneously.

One rare, unpublished Ming manuscript provides a clue as to why the emperor may have endorsed the creation of a new position:

In the winter of 1547, Korean authorities handed over to China, via Liaodong, some shipwrecked Chinese crewmembers, and remnants of a group of 341 traders from coastal Fujian under the leadership of one Feng Shu. In defiance of the sea-faring prohibitions they had sailed to Japan for trading purposes and had hit a storm on the way home. When this was reported to the Chinese Emperor, he replied that in recent years the coastal population had indeed broken the laws by trading with barbarians. Thus he ordered an investigation of why Fujian was so deeply involved as well as the arrest of coastal officials who failed in their duties.²⁹

Perhaps the emperor was embarrassed into action by the Koreans' discovery that he had lost control of his subjects.

Whatever led to the emperor's endorsement, in his new capacity, Zhu Wan faced strong resistance almost immediately. When, in the late fall, he pacified pirates in southern Fujian, local notables, including both officials and influential families, spread slander and tried to have him ousted on the grounds that he had overstepped his jurisdiction. Clearly, local trading interests felt threatened by this intrusion of central authority into their remote corner of the empire. For his part, Zhu claimed this was the first time in his whole official career that he had encountered anything but praise and expressions of gratitude for his efforts.

Nevertheless, Zhu Wan's campaign was just beginning. These initial obstacles apparently did not diminish his resolve. After all, he may have reasoned, he possessed an imperial mandate to do whatever was necessary to end lawlessness and restore order with what he assumed was unequivocal support at Court.

In the spring of 1548, Zhu investigated the maritime situation in the Ningbo area and discovered that hundreds of pirate-smugglers openly used the Shuangyu harbor of a nearby island as their headquarters, coming and going as they pleased. Families in southern Fujian supported the leaders of this lively maritime trading operation. While determined to seize strategic places such as this, Zhu discovered, to his chagrin, that along the coast generally, the patrol boats available to local guard units had diminished to one-tenth their original number, and skilled soldiers had dwindled to barely 40 percent of their former strength. Nevertheless, after commandeering boats from local residents, Zhu launched a successful surprise attack on the Shuangyu stronghold in

May, killing or dispersing its occupants. As had happened in Fujian, these raids provoked a strong reaction from locally influential people. According to Zhu, some even encouraged the pirates to try and kill him.³⁰

Meanwhile, throughout the coastal sector, Zhu supplemented his military actions with arrests of disloyal subjects and a strengthening of the *baojia* system, which emphasized mutual responsibility to improve local security. He also continued to press local guard units into pursuing the anti-smuggling campaign southward to coastal Wenzhou. This phase took about three months before the year ended.

These activities, however, by no means exhausted the demands on Zhu's attention. Somewhat earlier he had also needed: (1) to deal with the arrival ahead of schedule of Japan's latest, and last, tributary mission at Ningbo, (2) to fend off repeated challenges to his actions and decisions from a variety of officials, particularly those with personal connections to southern Fujian, and (3) to quell the bandits in the mining region of Zhejiang. Each one of these tasks was time-consuming for Zhu Wan. Moreover, he claims to have been ill much of the time as well.

Even though Zhu's successes were recognized—the Ministry of War rewarded him for his success at Shuangyu—his opponents continued to undermine him, releasing some of his prisoners in Fujian and challenging his punishment of others. By November, although the lobbying effort to dismiss him failed, his power was diminished when his assignment was changed in November to *xunshi*, “patrolling and inspecting.” Still, Zhu seems to have chosen to ignore these setbacks and in 1549 renewed his aggressive campaign as vigorously as before. In southern Fujian, he proceeded to win another victory, arresting over two hundred and executing a number of the captives including some of foreign identity, most likely Portuguese from Malacca. Again his actions touched off a storm of protest from well-connected individuals from prominent families and censors who clamored for his dismissal on grounds he had overstepped his authority. It is likely that some of those he executed were relatives of his critics.

At the end of his two-year campaign, Zhu expressed pride in his accomplishments and believed that he had effectively fulfilled his mission on the coast. However, his request to retire was denied. Instead, because of a complaint lodged by a Censor, the Emperor dismissed Zhu from his post pending an investigation. Fearing the worst, Zhu spent the remaining months of 1549 compiling documents from his government service to “set the record straight.” Evaluating himself as just a humble

scholar trying to do his duty, Zhu composed his own epitaph, and then, by the end of the year, took his own life, an act he admitted was unfilial, but a regrettable necessity.³¹ It is certainly very likely that by then, Zhu had learned of the unfortunate fates of Zeng and Xia. Indeed, as anticipated, the next year a posthumous guilty verdict and sentence of execution came down against Zhu Wan as well.

ZENG XIAN, SUPREME COMMANDER OF SHANXI

Turning next to Zeng Xian, we again have a case of a scholar-official turned military commander. However, unlike Zhu Wan, Zeng was born into a family of military ancestry. Although younger than Zhu, earning the *jìnshì* in 1529, Zeng's rise through the ranks of the bureaucracy was more rapid than Zhu's. After serving as a magistrate in Fujian, in 1534 he became a censor in Liaodong, where, working closely with a local military Vice Commander, he decisively put an end to a mutiny of soldiers and gained a reputation for success in military affairs. At the end of 1536, he became the Director of the Grand Court of Revision followed by appointment as an Assistant Vice Censor-in-Chief and Grand Coordinator of Shandong in 1541, the same year Zhu arrived in the provincial capital's Administration Office.³² There he became an expert in building defensive city walls. This made him a Vice Censor-in-Chief in 1543, and Grand Coordinator of Shanxi in 1544 with responsibility for defending passes and vital points along the Great Wall. In early 1546, he was promoted to Vice Minister of War and Supreme Commander (*zongdu*) of Northern Shaanxi.³³

Since the early 1540s, the formidable Mongol tribal leader, Altan (1507–82), a native of the Ordos, had been threatening Chinese territory. Despite the Mongols' fearsome reputation, Zeng's first encounter with a Mongol army in the fall of 1546 was successful. He led a military force into Shaanxi and, dividing it in two, attacked both front and rear of the enemy, killing many, and forcing its withdrawal. From this experience Zeng apparently gained new insights about the enemy, for he promptly recommended the dynasty adopt a more offensive strategy toward the Mongols. He argued confidently that the dynasty needed to reestablish military occupation of the area within the northern bend in the Yellow River known as the Hetao region.³⁴ This was a strategic region often used by Mongols to organize and mount their surprise attacks on weak points in the Ming defenses and for raids into north China. By keeping the enemy farther away, Zeng reasoned, this forward strategy would have the double benefit of making it much more

difficult, if not impossible, for Mongols to raid and plunder into Chinese territory, and the Ming's advance positions would provide a buffer and an early warning system against approaching trouble.

Until this point in the Jiajing reign, the emperor had supported the cautious, defensive, wall-building strategies of officials like Weng Wanda (1498–1552), who served as Supreme Commander of Xuanfu and Datong from 1542 to 1550. Now, in the mid-1540s, Weng was advocating permitting trade with the Mongols, for which Altan was repeatedly petitioning due to periodic drought and famine conditions on the steppe, but the emperor refused. With the continuing escalation of retaliatory raids by Altan, “The Emperor now wanted to punish the Mongols; he wanted an offensive stratagem.”³⁵

Xia Yan, who for a time had fallen out of favor with the emperor, now returned as Chief Grand Secretary and supported Zeng Xian's proposal. At first, the emperor seemed to back the recommendation but required Zeng to provide more specific information. In a long memorial of early 1547, Zeng presented the details of his plan. Basically, Zeng sought to achieve a long-term solution by combining a strong defense with a strong offense. First, to deter Mongol raids into Shanxi and Shaanxi, a fortified line from Ningxia to Western Shanxi would have to be constructed, and, secondly, to make this effective, Zeng wanted to lead annual military campaigns into the Ordos every spring for three years. In the spring, Zeng reasoned, Mongol horses would be weak from poor winter forage, and therefore less effective as cavalry. Zeng's offensive force would be a mixed but integrated one, comprised of foot soldiers, with some trained in firearms, plus cavalry, wagons, and a small naval force to move some troops and provisions by river.

While Zeng's proposal had considerable strategic and tactical merit, Weng Wanda, among others, criticized it in detail as too ambitious, unrealistic, and beyond the Ming's capacity at that time. In Weng's estimation it required too many supplies, too many troops (Zeng requested a force of 60,000 well-trained soldiers), and the cost was prohibitive. Furthermore, Zeng too had political enemies eager to undermine him, and some critics accused him of corruption. The criticisms were significant, but the emperor apparently ended up changing his mind for other reasons and, in February 1548, suddenly withdrew his support for Zeng's plan. Zeng Xian was then placed under arrest and executed in April.³⁶ No further offensives versus the Mongols were undertaken until well after Altan laid siege to Beijing in 1550. Zeng's rapid downfall was as seemingly inexplicable as it was precipitous. We must look to court politics for an explanation.

XIA YAN, CHIEF GRAND SECRETARY

It was not a coincidence that Zhu and Zeng came to serve in their border posts at the same time or that they proposed similar solutions to the border problems they faced. As we stated earlier, the top official most responsible for their appointments was Chief Grand Secretary Xia Yan. While researchers have focused attention on Xia Yan's involvement in the Ordos controversy, my research shows that long before this time, as early as 1523, Xia Yan was actively promoting reform of coastal defenses as well. Perceiving unpreparedness, passivity, and a lack of leadership in defense forces there, he was already advocating a more proactive government involvement comparable to the stance he took in the later Ordos controversy.³⁷

Xia Yan's ancestors were from military backgrounds, but his father obtained the *jinshi* in 1496 and served in Beijing where Xia spent most of his youth. After obtaining the *jinshi* degree in 1517, Xia himself became a Supervising Secretary in 1520 and reported on military affairs for the Ministry of War. In 1522, at this early stage of his career, he began to report on coastal disturbances and successfully advocated the elimination of eunuch control of tribute trade at Ningbo, which he identified as a cause of corruption and conflict in the tributary relationship with Japan. Xia's second proposal, in 1529, resulted in the appointment of an Inspector General for Zhejiang and Fujian to improve coastal defense, but, for a variety of reasons, the outcome was disappointing, and there was little substantive change or improvement.³⁸

After resolving a complicated 1528 dispute among civil and military officials in Shanxi, Xia was promoted to Chief Supervising Secretary for the Ministry of Personnel. In 1530, Xia then came to the attention of the emperor who adopted substantial ritual reforms in the capital that Xia had recommended. The next year, in recognition, the emperor made him Minister of Rites. Over the next few years Xia's favor with the emperor continued steadily to rise, and many honors were bestowed on him. Subsequently, in 1537, he became a Grand Secretary and then, two years later, the Chief Grand Secretary. But in this capacity, the emperor found Xia too often incomplicit with his views, so he dismissed him in 1542. Right before his departure, Xia's protégé and future enemy, Yan Song, entered the Grand Secretariat, but initially fared little better with the emperor. Xia was returned to the Grand Secretariat in 1545 and restored as Chief Grand Secretary in 1547. It was then that Xia appointed Zhu Wan and Zeng Xian to their elevated positions and supported their efforts to implement forward strategies and offensive campaigns on the two borders. However, by this time, Xia Yan and Yan Song had become

bitter enemies and rivals locked in a desperate and notorious power struggle, the ultimate byproduct of which would be abandonment of the forward policy on both strategic borders.

REASSESSING XIA AND ZENG

In the historical aftermath of these events, Xia Yan and Zeng Xian have been generally regarded, as have so many other civil officials in the Ming, as upright officials who ended up something like martyred heroes, while Yan Song has been branded as more of an unscrupulous villain. Since the time the fates of Xia Yan and Zeng Xian were sealed, a recurring historical opinion in Chinese sources has been that a great error had been made. The execution of earnest officials had been an unnecessary sacrifice. While Xia and Zeng have been well remembered, Zhu Wan's important role has been largely forgotten, even though he was closely linked to the other two men.³⁹

As we have seen, once Xia Yan was restored as Chief Grand Secretary in 1547, he hastened to create the post of Coastal Defense Grand Coordinator with added responsibility for military affairs and to get Zhu Wan appointed to it. Zhu Wan then undertook a detailed investigation and commenced vigorous suppression of the two centers of foreign trade and piracy in Zhejiang and Fujian, especially targeting the offshore islands used both for illegal maritime trade and as staging areas for pirate raids on the mainland. Once he had completed this task in Zhejiang, he moved on to Fujian. However, as recounted above, his support at court by then evaporated amidst mounting local criticism both of the aggressive methods Zhu Wan used as well as of his character.

While not always connected in the sources, the coastal situation, as I have tried to show here, was linked in numerous ways to the parallel Ordos situation, especially in the eyes of the civil officials acting in military roles as Grand Coordinators. It is instructive to think of them viewing the two crises as two sides of the same coin. Zhu Wan's forward policy seemed to be working on the coast, but was locally hated. When Xia and Zeng failed to push through their forward policy for the north, there remained only the status quo. Not long after, however, the crisis deepened as both frontiers experienced a dramatic escalation in chaos and strife, essentially a two-front war, posing a severe and costly military test for the dynasty that lasted well into the 1550s and early 1560s.

It appears that the local vested interests involved in maritime trade—local prominent families, local merchants, and local authorities in Zhejiang and Fujian—successfully employed their court connections to

obstruct Zhu Wan and to diminish his power. The anti-Zhu lobby found willing allies in Yan Song and his associates, who were eager to find a way to weaken if not to destroy Xia. An effective approach to blocking Zhu Wan and Xia Yan was to blame Xia Yan for Zhu Wan's "excesses."⁴⁰

In addition, I have also tried to show that the ties between the pro-maritime trade lobby and the Yan Song clique were deeper than just political expediency or opportunism. The two groups seem to have been interconnected in various ways and to have shared a harmony of views and interests including maintaining the status quo, especially government non-interference in trade. More study may reveal additional connections and more reasons for their affinity of interests. Study of the Zhu Wan affair certainly indicates there was a great deal of communication among the local pro-trade lobby of Fujian, capital officials, and the court, as well as considerable political maneuvering behind the scenes, to terminate Zhu Wan's tenure as Grand Coordinator.

It is also important to note that the campaign to block Zhu Wan did not reach a conclusion until after the Ordos controversy broke out at court. Because the Mongols were always seen as the more serious threat, that issue soon eclipsed the question of how to respond to the critics of Zhu Wan. It is significant that the Ordos and coastal controversies divided the court along similar lines. It was not until the one was decided that the other could be resolved. In the end, the outcome of both controversies depended on who had the most influence with the emperor. It was Yan Song who had the greater success, and thus was able to weaken the emperor's earlier resolve to punish the Mongols. The emperor's dramatic change of mind resulted in Xia and Zeng not only being dismissed from their posts but executed as well.⁴¹

However, intentionally or not, the emperor's decision also reversed the dynasty's coastal defense policy at the same time. With the elimination of Xia Yan, there was no one left to blunt Zhu Wan's critics at court or to advocate prolonging his own application of the forward policy in the southeast. Suddenly politically isolated and realizing that he had lost his support at court, Zhu knew the coastal lobby would press its advantage until he too was destroyed. His enemies were succeeding in turning his victories into crimes. Correct in his estimation that Xia and Zeng's deaths made his own execution inevitable, Zhu took his own life.

Thus ended, suddenly and rather ignominiously, due to a change of imperial will, the campaign to restore Ming military vigor and to seize control of these two threatened borders. The entire episode reveals the degree to which by 1549 diminished military strength, entrenched

private interests, divisive court politics, and imperial unpredictability combined to render military policy decision-making an erratic process that undermined the ability of the court to address even major crises in an effective, orderly, or coordinated way.

In fact, one can argue that because of this politically paralyzing episode the Ming lost more control and yielded even more territory to its enemies. In the north, the Ming continued to suffer Mongol attacks well within the borders of China, including one in 1550 that approached the outskirts of Beijing, throwing the capital into a panic. The effect on the coast was in some ways even more dramatic because unprecedented in scale. The circumstances of Zhu Wan's fall invited even more daring and violent pirate attacks. Over the next decade, pirates were free to raid at will all along the coast and well inland, from the Yangzi delta to eastern Guangdong, and up the Yangzi River as far as Nanjing. No one on the coast had ever experienced anything like it, and the dilemma of how and where to control the coastal border remained a thorny dilemma well into the next dynasty.⁴²

NEW APPROACHES

As historians, of course, we are interested in understanding why these events of 1547–49 occurred, what motivated the various participants, and why certain choices were made to the exclusion of others. However, because available documents have their limitations, it is useful to draw upon the theoretical perspectives of other disciplines that frame questions differently. For example, an ambitious, broad-ranging study by an American political scientist, Alastair Iain Johnston, can help us evaluate the offensive strategic policies proposed by Zeng Xian, and by extension, Zhu Wan.⁴³ To summarize a rather complex and often highly technical argument, in this study the author investigates historical examples of pre-Ming Chinese strategic thinking to determine whether there is a continuous, culturally specific tradition of Chinese strategic thought, and if so, to what degree it might still be influential in the present. He demonstrates that while a “symbolic” culture of strategic thinking does exist in Chinese thought (as represented in the *Art of War* (*Sunzi Bingfa*) and the Confucian-Mencian tradition), what the Chinese tradition has actually been in practice, he notes, is more consistent with a “realpolitik” pattern, as represented in the *Seven Military Classics*, or *Wujing qishu*. Then Johnston goes on to show how this Chinese tradition of realism is empirically observable using a detailed case study of Ming strategic thinking regarding the Mongols.⁴⁴

Johnston then surveys an array of documents by Ming officials for

evidence of strategic thinking about Mongol policy. Included among the principal thinkers are the more offense-minded Zeng Xian and the more accommodationist Weng Wanda. The overall pattern of strategic thought Johnston identifies is one he calls “Cultural Realism,” hence the title of his study. The cultural realism China practices in the Ming, as well as in ancient times, follows what he describes as a “*parabellum* paradigm,” which consists of a persistent preference for coercive campaigns against external enemies. He adds, however, that a calculus of opportunity versus capability modifies this strategic preference. Over centuries of socialization into this type of “hard realpolitik” strategic thinking, Johnston concludes, Chinese decision makers have “placed a high degree of value on the use of pure violence to resolve security conflicts.”⁴⁵ However, he continues, this preference for the use of coercive force is nearly always weighed against available “capacities” and other relevant variables.

Thus, according to Johnston’s analysis, Zeng Xian, and I would argue Zhu Wan also, was actually following a traditional pattern of Ming strategic thinking when he proposed a forward campaign against the enemy.⁴⁶ On the other hand, Arthur Waldron, in his study of the Ordos controversy, views Weng Wanda’s criticism of Zeng’s proposal as a complete rejection of the forward policy, and therefore as a more “realistic” assessment than Zeng’s.⁴⁷ Johnston, however, disagrees, pointing out that Weng Wanda’s criticisms were not a rejection of the forward policy per se, but rather, about the timeliness of such an ambitious program. Weng Wanda thought the Ming lacked the capability to successfully carry out an offensive operation of such magnitude at that time.

What I find useful in Johnston’s analysis is that the more coercive border control recommendations of Xia Yan, Zhu Wan, and Zeng Xian, which amounted to extending China’s perimeters outward to incorporate regions abandoned previously to the enemy, are compatible with the traditional Chinese strategic orientation his study identifies. In other words, he shows the so-called “forward policy” to be well within the mainstream of traditional operational modes of Chinese strategic thought.

The implications of Johnston’s findings on strategic thinking therefore conflict with Waldron’s views on foreign policy decision-making. Waldron characterizes as more “pragmatic” and “realist” the faction dominated by Grand Secretary Yan Song, which opposed the policies of Xia Yan and Zeng Xian. Waldron believes the Yan Song clique was more pragmatic because it saw the lure of trade as the best method for managing the Mongols. In his assessment of the arguments against the

forward policy, Waldron thus appears to favor the “accommodationist” position advocated by Weng Wanda. As evidence, he points to events of some twenty years later, when a decade-long period of peaceful trading relations with the Mongols eventually did occur after 1571.⁴⁸

However, there exist more compelling explanations for that development. It can also be argued that by then, both sides were suffering from war-weariness, and the Mongols were as ready for compromise as the Ming. Furthermore, during those years, in 1578, Altan converted to Buddhism and died in 1582. After his death, no other leader of his type emerged, and Mongol unity remained as elusive as ever.⁴⁹ As we know, the major source of danger to the dynasty then shifted from the Mongols to the Manchu threat in the northeast.

Moreover, just because Xia and Zeng were defeated in 1548 does not mean Yan Song was a strategic policy pragmatist. Waldron does not argue that the victory of the Yan Song faction solved the problems on either border. Both in fact became immediately worse than before and remained problematic for many years to come. This is what caused many people, in and out of government, as Waldron admits, to think a huge mistake had been made and to wish Xia Yan and Zeng Xian had not been killed.⁵⁰

It is crucial to recognize that various Ming efforts since the mid-fourteenth century to use the lure of more tribute and trade to restore order (the accommodationist position represented by Weng Wanda) had already been tried several times without the desired effect. Sometimes the Mongols, for example, refused an offer of peaceful trade in favor of raiding. As we have emphasized, flourishing *de facto* foreign trade already existed in the first half of the sixteenth century on both borders, yet there was little law and order, peace or stability.

For Chinese officials, using the lure of trade as a reward or the withholding of trade as a punishment through the tributary system often failed because there was little incentive for the outsiders (Mongols, Japanese, maritime traders or smugglers) to comply with a system they had no control over and that did not meet their needs. The tributary system was so restricted it had become a frequent source of conflict, such as between competing groups of tributaries. Meanwhile, local Chinese involved in the private trade were in a position to employ a whole battery of tricks to keep any foreign trade that did occur largely advantageous to themselves. This situation too caused conflict and could incur violent reprisals. By the 1540s, foreign traders not only wanted more trade, but more importantly wanted trade on more favorable terms. However, there is one more important consideration: as long as

the foreigner had an attractive and viable alternative to an unfavorable trade arrangement, that is to say, as long as they could turn to raiding and plundering when it suited them, there was little incentive to trade peacefully or to tolerate unfair trade. As long as they could obtain through violent means what they could not obtain through peaceful channels, raiders would continue indefinitely to create instability on both borders.

On the other hand, the trading population on the borders of Fujian, for example, did not want the government to upset the favorable advantages they enjoyed. It is highly probable that this was the case on the northern border as well, where a lively cross-border trade was also occurring. From the point of view of Grand Coordinators on both borders, a better alternative was to break up the *de facto* foreign trade, which was a frequent source of conflict—and which was illegal anyway—and to create a buffer zone between the two populations. To break the cycle of trading and raiding, pushing the enemy far enough away from the border would reduce contact and collusion with the local population and reduce or eliminate the possibility of launching potentially devastating surprise attacks. As we have seen, Zeng's and Zhu's forward policies both saw denying the enemy use of staging areas as necessary elements of deterrence and pacification.

In this context, it is very interesting to recall that the Manchu Qing government also found the southeast coast a very difficult zone to control. In 1660, Qing officials made an extraordinary response to the equally extraordinary but failed attempt of the greatest pirate-trader of Chinese history, Zheng Chenggong (Koxinga, 1624–62), to sail his fleet up the Yangzi River to raid Nanjing. The Qing response was to initiate a forced evacuation inland of the entire coastal population of four provinces, for a distance of twenty miles. Nothing was left behind that could be of any use to pirates. This unprecedented approach, what is called an evacuation policy, was kept in place for over ten years even though it caused great hardship to the local residents up and down the coast.⁵¹

What is fascinating in this instance is that, while otherwise lacking the means to dislodge Zheng Chenggong from his base of operations on Taiwan, Qing officials latched onto the idea of creating a desert, a no-man's land, between the enemy on the island and the Chinese population well inland, allowing no shipping whatsoever. They created the necessary buffer by pulling the border inward, and then waited until after Zheng's death. In 1683, when the time was right, a fleet was amassed and sent to attack Taiwan where the last of Zheng's force was driven away. The next year, Taiwan was annexed as part of Fujian

province, and permanent garrisons of troops were placed both on Taiwan and the Pescadores Islands.⁵²

In comparison with the Qing evacuation policy, the measures undertaken by Zhu Wan and those proposed by Zeng Xian do not look so extreme, even though they share some similar elements, including the notion of the buffer zone and removing the incentives to plunder by making it so much more difficult and so much less appealing. The “parabellum” paradigm still applies in the Qing case, because once the capacity to carry out the preferred forward strategy was possible, it was applied successfully. What was partially lacking in the 1540s was consensus about what the Ming military capabilities actually were. While there appears to have been honest disagreement, such as between Zeng Xian and Weng Wanda about timing, what was not lacking was the willingness of some activist, post-Wang Shouren Grand Coordinators to take personal risks and attempt to reform and lead the Ming out of its military torpor.⁵³

PERPETUAL TWO-FRONT WARS

When we take both border regions into account, it becomes clear that the military dilemma the Ming faced in 1547 was a double threat posed by Mongols and pirates. As at least one Ming official suggested at the time, it was a two-front war.⁵⁴

Both borders manifested similar problems. The century-long defensive posture of holding the line, less and less successfully, at the Great Wall and the ocean’s edge, was inadequate. It locked the Ming into an inflexible, static defensive posture, which in a period of declining military capability, inadequate finances, and paralysis of the decision-making process, made reform or change very difficult. The Ming’s inability to restore implementation of a forward policy yielded too much vital territory and strategic advantage to its enemies. In following years, this forced the Chinese mostly to react to surprise attacks. It exacted a high toll before the Chinese military was able to initiate its own innovative approaches and to maximize what military resources still remained.⁵⁵ In fact, such a state of affairs was the norm rather than the exception for much of the Ming dynasty. Thus historians should start paying more attention to the innovative ways in which civil and military officials grappled with these constant challenges and maintained Ming supremacy in Asia rather than dwelling upon their failures and shortcomings.

As we have seen in our examples, after decades of neglect,

conscientious civil officials did arise who confronted, sometimes successfully, persisting military problems on the borders. However, by the mid-sixteenth century, dramatic changes resulting from increased cross-border trade and contact had transformed socio-economic conditions and opened up new avenues of economic possibility for peoples on both sides of the border. At the same time, as our two frontiers became more porous and uncontrolled, wilder, more disruptive, and lawless elements, spurred by the lure of profit or plunder, had gradually come to dominate both borders to the detriment of social order. Official neglect, apathy, corruption, and very often collusion, were revealed and condemned when investigations, such as Zhu Wan's, finally occurred, but there was no quick or easy remedy. Inaction or the mere semblance of action, while appealing for some officials because it posed less risk to life and career, was itself costly. While officials equivocated, a heavy price was paid not only in loss of life and property, but also in military demoralization, dynastic humiliation, and loss of prestige at home and abroad.

As Kenneth Swope has shown, the Ming was not alone among previous Chinese or other earlier historical empires (think Rome, Persia, Byzantium, Mughal India) in displaying raw manifestations of imperial power—political, military, symbolic, even architectural (think vast palaces and defensive walls as discussed by Aurelia Campbell in the present volume)—to intimidate enemies, foreign and domestic, into compliance with imperial authority. In China, in previous dynasties as well as in the Ming, this grand strategy of threatening overwhelming force, a strategy of “awesomeness,” acted as an important deterrent, was more economical in terms of lost personnel and material, and necessary to maintain China's presence as a hegemonic, stabilizing force in East Asia. Only a few Ming emperors possessed the disposition to push for large-scale military actions or punitive strikes (Swope cites Yongle, Zhengde, and Wanli as salient examples) and, ultimately, it was an imperial decision whether or not to go forward with an aggressive plan of punitive action with its implicit risks.⁵⁶

We cannot adequately evaluate the behavior of officials, therefore, without emphasizing the erratic behavior of the Jiajing Emperor regarding policy decision-making. When at the start of his reign, the emperor, in a fervent effort to honor his parents, decided to make unorthodox ritual changes on his own, he encountered stiff opposition from his scholar-officials. Revealing a tyrannical dimension to his personality, he violently vented his anger by meting out harsh punishments. Although he got his way in the ritual controversy, the emperor thereafter displayed deep suspicion and distrust of his bureaucracy as well as a predisposition for despotism and brutality.

During his reign he repeatedly played officials off against one another, showed contempt for those who did not curry his favor, and severely punished those whom he distrusted or disagreed with. This added a high degree of unpredictability to all imperial-bureaucratic interactions and a highly chaotic element to the decision-making process. On top of this, like his predecessors, the emperor was deeply suspicious of anyone who possessed any military capability, such as a General or a Grand Coordinator. His suspicion extended even to his best officials. Zeng Xian was not the first talented military leader to suffer this fate.

The emperor's unpredictable behavior, combined with the politically charged atmosphere in which significant security issues were decided, thus makes it rather difficult if not impossible to determine whether, for example, substantive arguments for and against the "Forward Policy" of Zeng Xian were actually taken into account or had any influence at all on the emperor's decision-making.

In my view the defeat of the forward policy in 1549 was a fateful decision for the dynasty. We cannot know, of course, whether implementation of the forward policy might have saved the dynasty from years of two-front war. What Ming sources do show is that after 1549 the Yan Song faction dominated the court virtually unchallenged, unaccountable to anyone, even the emperor. They had won the power struggle, but at a cost. Border problems only worsened. Ironically, to secure power for himself and his allies, Yan Song had eliminated officials actively trying to improve border security. Subsequently, Yan Song himself had then to assume that responsibility from scratch and without a plan. The defeat of the forward policy on both frontiers in 1549 seems to have emboldened both the Mongols and the pirates to undertake ever more audacious attacks. If the emperor thought he was avoiding placing an undue burden on border populations by disapproving costly offensive campaigns, as one author suggests,⁵⁷ then it hardly could have been worse than what actually happened. The northern border experienced fifteen more years of unabated Mongol incursions, while the halting of Zhu Wan's apparently successful offensive campaign on the coast was followed by a decade of chaos with brazen pirate raids deep into the Jiangnan area as far as Nanjing. Meanwhile, Yan Song's reputation among Ming officials declined precipitously while the two executed officials, increasingly esteemed as martyrs, were eventually exonerated in 1567. Zhu's turn came in 1587.⁵⁸

Perhaps more damaging still is that once the forward policy was rejected in 1549, officials were reluctant to resurrect it. Active reconsideration of a forward policy was delayed to the Wanli era.⁵⁹ The Ming in the mid-Jiajing was close to entering a stage of military

paralysis. For the next decade and a half, it struggled to gain the upper hand along its two most important borders. Although the empire did manage to survive these threats, its prestige was shaken. Even though the Ming military did manage to win a victory over the Japanese in Korea in the 1590s, it struggled to find an effective approach to handling the even greater Manchu threat after 1600, especially amidst domestic rebellion.⁶⁰ During the late Ming, court factionalism and unpredictable imperial leadership continued frequently to turn military policy debates into political tugs-of-war.

The experiences of two border officials, the two contemporaries Zeng Xian and Zhu Wan, tell us much about the challenging complexities and political uncertainties Chinese border officials confronted throughout much of the sixteenth century. These two Grand Coordinators foresaw potentially worsening scenarios in their respective border regions if bold action was not taken. Both were likely inspired by the earlier example of Wang Shouren in doing so. And both were thwarted in carrying out their missions by political opponents for political reasons, not ideological ones, and not even military or strategic ones.

As Timothy Brook has observed—and I would apply his insight to our two-border controversy as well—what appears to be substantive debate about what goes on in borderlands, can be deceiving.

None of this [language] will reveal much about what went on in the borderland; but some of it should indicate what borders could be made to do through the process of being talked about as well as how the borderland could provide fodder for political struggles that had nothing whatsoever to do with borders.⁶¹

Competent border officials in the late Ming, as we have attempted to show, incurred a special vulnerability to political attack from rivals.

Thus our cases, often forgotten and even less often linked together, stand out as examples of what could and often did go awry with Ming border control. They demonstrate the great political and personal risks incurred by reform-minded officials on the peripheries as they sought solutions to “intractable problems,” even ones within the traditional range of responses to border threats.

NOTES

- 1 For an informative and concise overview of Ming China's foreign relations with its principal neighbors across approximately 7,000 miles of borders, see John W. Dardess, *Ming China, 1368–1644, A Concise History of a Resilient Empire*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), Chapter One, “Frontiers.” A

valuable collection of specialized scholarly case studies manifesting a broad array of challenges and difficulties faced by border officials and policy-makers that also addresses conceptual and theoretical concerns for the researcher is: Diana Lary, ed., *The Chinese State at the Borders* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007).

- 2 For brief and thoughtful political history of borders and survey of the growing field of border studies, see Alexander C. Diener and Joshua Hagen, *Borders: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
- 3 An elaborate description of the towers, beacons, signals, crews, and details of their functioning is Henry Serruys, "Towers in the Northern Frontier Defense of the Ming," *Ming Studies* 14, (1982), 9–76. The parallel southeast coastal system seems to have been virtually identical. This awaits further study. See Kenneth Swope, *A Dragon's Head and a Serpent's Tail: Ming China and the First Great East Asian War, 1592–1598* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 127–8, for a Wanli period defensive upgrade with cannon.
- 4 Where the land meets the sea there is clear boundary, but here the word frontier doesn't apply. My interest is to point out the commonalities between the two borders. The real ocean was likewise a space into which pirates could easily escape to evade capture.
- 5 The expression "forward policy" is used to represent the views of those advocating the return to a proactive, militarily more offensive and aggressive policy toward border defense against the Mongols, implying recovery of formerly Chinese occupied territory, such as the Ordos region, relinquished to the Mongols in the period since the end of the Yongle reign. The gradual drawing inward of defense lines and building of walls to protect Beijing had left strategic advantages to the Mongols who over decades pressed for more trade but were too often refused and angered by Ming intransigence. My goal again is to indicate that the forward policy applied to the southeast coast as well in this time period.
- 6 See Ng Chin-keong, "Maritime Frontiers, Territorial Expansion and *Hai-fang* during the Late Ming and High Ch'ing," in Sabine Dabringhaus and Roderick Ptak, eds., *China and Her Neighbors: Borders, Visions of the Other, Foreign Policy 10th to 19th Century* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1997), 211–57. Ng provides an excellent understanding of the complexities of maritime defense issues and problems as well the challenges of policy-making over two dynasties.
- 7 For the translation of official titles into English, I follow Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1985).
- 8 Two major studies in English of piracy and the Ordos controversy are So Kwan-wai, *Japanese Piracy in Ming China during the 16th Century* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1975) and Arthur Waldron, *The Great Wall of China: From History to Myth* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), respectively. Both are important scholarly investigations of their subjects. My investigation, on the other hand, calls attention to the strategic, military, administrative, political, and even socio-economic parallels between the two that the regional Grand Coordinators faced. Both policy issues arose at the same time and were decided in similar fashion.
- 9 See Rossabi, "The Ming and Inner Asia," in *CHC* 8, 231–6.
- 10 Wu Chi-hua, "The Contraction of Forward Defences on the North China Frontier during the Ming Dynasty," *Papers on Far Eastern History* 17 (1978), 1–13, and Lo Jung-pang, "The Decline of the Early Ming Navy," *Oriens Extremis* 5.2 (1958), 149–68.
- 11 Rossabi, Morris, "The Tea and Horse Trade with Inner Asia during the Ming,"

Journal of Asian History 4 (1970), 136–68, and Higgins, “Pirates in Gowns and Caps: Gentry Law-breaking in the mid-Ming,” *Ming Studies* 10 (1980), 30–37. For relevant articles of the *Ming Code* regarding illicit trade across borders, see Jiang Yonglin, *The Great Ming Code: Da Ming lü* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), such as article 166, “Maritime merchants hiding goods,” 104; article 246, “Crossing frontiers without authorization or going to sea in violation of the prohibitions,” 140–41. Henry Shih-shan Tsai, *The Eunuchs of the Ming Dynasty* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997) provides the context for eunuch activities in military affairs, trade and tribute, including maritime trade and tea-horse trade, the economy, tax collecting, and much more.

- 12 Li Kangying’s *The Ming Maritime Trade Policy in Transition, 1368 to 1567* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2010), provides a comprehensive survey of the emergence of the pro-trade lobby within officialdom and its eventual victory in 1567 with the lifting of the early Ming anti-trade restrictions. Our purpose here is to understand the immediate pressures faced by border officials such as Zhu and Zeng dealing with lawlessness and violence. While Li would categorize them as ideological conservatives in the evolving policy debates about trade, it is how politics influenced the immediate outcome of the policy debate over defense in 1549 that concerns us here. Notably, John Dardess in his study of the late Jiajing Chief Grand Secretary, Xu Jie, 40–41, pensively concludes that, “Confucian ideology played a very minor role at best.” See John Dardess, *A Political Life in Ming China: A Grand Secretary and his Times* (Lanham, MD: Roman and Littlefield, 2012). His analysis of Xu’s writings on defense indicates that Xu “championed a reasonable interpretation of the facts: that the northern attackers and the coastal raiders were anarchic, multiethnic plunder machines, not ordered societies; that it was unthinkable for China simply to surrender territory and cave in to demands from such entities; that China’s weak defense must by all means be improved and enlarged first; and then, if agreements were to be made, it must be China that controls the terms.” This assertion does not mean Xu supported Zeng’s desire to invade and annex the Ordos, however, p. 47.
- 13 David Robinson, *Bandits, Eunuchs, and the Son of Heaven: Rebellion and the Economy of Violence in Mid-Ming China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001) is an innovative study that sees violence due to banditry and rebellion not as exceptional, but as an integrated part of Ming life, one not limited to specific historical moments such as the rise of piracy on the coastal periphery, although such crises did prompt officials to reconsider existing policies and to suggest alternatives, pp. 4–5.
- 14 With the notable exception of Taiwan, which plays no role here. However, it is useful to recall that after the events discussed here, Taiwan became for many years a major base of maritime operations under the leader known as Koxinga.
- 15 The Zhengde emperor attempted to restore the martial vigor of the Ming. He was aware of how much the regime’s military leadership had declined from earlier times. Civilian bureaucrats were making military policy and eunuchs had assumed military roles. He faced stiff resistance when personally taking charge of military affairs. James Geiss concludes that although the emperor was later praised by some for his “martial spirit” and his desire to reverse military weaknesses, his “vision of himself as a warrior-ruler was not compatible with the ritual and bureaucratic norms by which his officials expected him to live.” Geiss, “Cheng-te Reign,” in *CHC* 7, 439.
- 16 Ray Huang, *1587, A Year of No Significance: The Ming Dynasty in Decline* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981) takes this view. Waldron attributes this

“narrower and culturally more limited vision” to a revival of the “Southern Song vision of a culturally uniform China” in the second half of the Ming period. See Waldron, *The Great Wall*, 190. I do not think this is what motivated military-minded reformist officials like Xia, Zeng, and Zhu, as Waldron implies. These advocates of a forward policy saw merit in the views once dominant in the early Ming, and desired to extend the boundaries of Ming control back to what they were before the second half of the Ming. Frontier conditions had indeed changed in the meantime, but few had a clear vision of how to respond. In this regard, the influence of Wang Shouren on reformist officials will be addressed below. Recent work by Tonio Andrade, *The Gunpowder Age: China, Military Innovation, and Rise of the West in World History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016) and Sun Laichen, “Military Technology Transfers from Ming China and the Emergence of Northern Mainland Southeast Asia (c. 1390–1527),” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 34.3 (2003), 495–517, taking a world historical perspective, show the Ming empire was technologically among the most dynamic and innovative, playing a leading role in the development of gunpowder weapons and their tactical employment.

- 17 Cf. Lo Jung-pang. Zhu Wan marveled at the hundreds of boats and ships he saw in and around the waters off the coast of Zhejiang. Evidence indicates that prominent coastal families financed the building of seaworthy vessels used for trade.
- 18 In a remarkably detailed study of the Jiajing era Grand Secretary, Xu Jie (1503–83), John Dardess provides perhaps the most penetrating view yet of just how complicated and fraught with danger the politics of crisis management could be at the center of Ming government, in *A Political life in Ming China: A Grand Secretary and his Times* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2013).
- 19 Roland L. Higgins, *Piracy and Coastal Defense in the Ming Period: Government Response to Coastal Disturbances, 1523–1549* (Ph.D. Diss., University of Minnesota, 1981). See also Higgins, “Pirates in Gowns and Caps,” and Higgins, “Piracy: Japanese Piracy in China” and “Tributary System,” in *Encyclopedia of Asian History*, edited by Ainslie T. Embree (New York: The Asia Society and Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1988). My dissertation research was briefly summarized by the late James Geiss in “The Chia-Ching Reign, 1522–1566,” *CHC* 7, 465, 490–95, and 498. In an effort to limit the number of references to East Asian sources, I will just mention here that my research was based primarily on Ming sources, including but not limited to the *Mingshi*, the *Ming shihlu*, *Daming huidian*, *Guoque*, collected writings of Zhu Wan and Xia Yan, local and provincial gazetteers (*difangzhi*), among others.
- 20 Dardess, *A Political Life*, 14, 28, classifies Xia Yan, appropriately enough, as a “war hawk” who advocated more aggressive policies toward Vietnam as well as the Mongols.
- 21 Mote and Twitchett, *CHC* 7, 292–3.
- 22 Mote and Twitchett, *CHC* 7, 293.
- 23 As Kenneth Swope’s studies of the late Ming emperors Wanli and Chongzhen at war demonstrate, they continued to use eunuchs and military officials to counterbalance the power of civil officials. See Swope, *A Dragon’s Head*, and Swope, *Military Collapse*.
- 24 Mote and Twitchett, *CHC* 7, 372.
- 25 See Zhu Wan’s biographies in *DMB*, 372–5, and in the *Mingshi*, *juan* 205, 5403–5. Certain personal details of Zhu Wan’s life are based on my translation of his autobiographical epitaph contained in Jiao Hong, (ed.) *Guochao xiancheng lu*,

- (*juan* 62:44–7), volume 4, 2647–8.
- 26 See Zeng Xian's biography in *DMB*, 1303–5.
 - 27 One source, Xu Kairen, *Ming mingchen yanxing lu*, *juan* 59, p. 14b, suggests Zeng and Zhu knew each other since childhood.
 - 28 It is interesting that Zhu Wan became a Grand Coordinator of southern Jiangxi, where, in 1516–18, Wang Shouren (Wang Yangming, 1472–1529) had made his reputation as one of the most effective of all Grand Coordinators. In bandit suppression, Wang pushed vigorously for broad military reforms and use of rewards and punishments to achieve success. Wang became an emulation model for many late Ming officials. See Yu-chuan Chang, *Wang Shou-jen as a Statesman* (New York: Praeger, 1975). A number of officials who were followers of Wang's example wrote posthumous tributes to Zhu Wan. See Higgins, *Piracy and Coastal Defense*, 200 and 248.
 - 29 Higgins, *Piracy and Coastal Defense*, 161. The source is Fan Shouji, *Huangming suhuang waishi*, *juan* 27, 1a–b.
 - 30 Jiao Hong.
 - 31 Jiao Hong.
 - 32 Zeng's biography is available in *DMB*, 1303–5, and *Mingshi*, *juan* 204.
 - 33 Waldron, *The Great Wall*, 126.
 - 34 Hetao was a fertile oasis-like area along the northern bend of the Yellow River surrounded by the barren Ordos desert. Given the theme of this chapter, we can say Hetao approached something like a verdant island in the desert. After 1449, Mongols had become once again more or less permanent residents of this strategic region, as had happened repeatedly in previous dynasties.
 - 35 Geiss, "The Chia-Ching Reign, 1522–1566," 472–4. Works on the Mongols by Henry Serruys cover this, especially, *Sino-Mongol Relations in the Ming*, vol. 3, *Trade Relations*, in *Mélanges chinois et bouddiques*, vol. 14, 1966–67 (Brussels: Institut belge des hautes études chinoises, 1967); see also *Mingshi jishi benmo*, *juan* 58.
 - 36 Geiss, "The Chia-Ching Reign, 1522–1566," 474, and *DMB*, 1304. Compare Waldron, *The Great Wall*, 125–7.
 - 37 Xia Yan also took the same forward policy position in the debate over Vietnam's succession crisis 1537–40, a third border controversy we unfortunately cannot go into here. Waldron, *The Great Wall*, 177. For a valuable review of the historiography on the Ming dynasty's military activities, policies, and border security challenges, including a periodization of policy shifts, see Kenneth M. Swope, "Manifesting Awe: Grand Strategy and Imperial Leadership in the Ming Dynasty," *The Journal of Military History*, 79.3 (July 2015), 597–634.
 - 38 Higgins, *Piracy and Coastal Defense*, 109–35.
 - 39 Higgins, *Piracy and Coastal Defense*, 197–201. For a Ming official's view of Zhu as upright but inflexible, see Ng, "Maritime Frontiers," 244.
 - 40 Higgins, "Pirates in Caps and Gowns."
 - 41 Geiss, "The Chia-Ching Reign, 1522–1566," *CHC* 7, 474–5.
 - 42 Frederick W. Mote, *Imperial China, 900–1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 834–7 and 848–9. When Jesuits arrived in Nanjing in the late Wanli period, some residents looked upon them suspiciously as possible Japanese spies.
 - 43 Alastair I. Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

- 44 Again, see Swope, “Manifesting Awe,” 601–7, for a review of this and other political science works about Ming strategy.
- 45 Johnston, *Cultural Realism*, ix–xii. A counter interpretation is offered in a detailed study undertaken by Wang Yuan-kang, *Harmony and War: Confucian Culture and Chinese Power Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011) in which China’s foreign relations are concluded to be more influenced by power relationships, “structural realism,” than by “cultural realism,” in understanding China’s grand strategy, including during the Ming period.
- 46 Johnston, *Cultural Realism*, 188–90 and 205–6.
- 47 Johnston, *Cultural Realism*, 206–9 and 190, fn 20. Compare Waldron, *The Great Wall*, 109–10.
- 48 Waldron, *The Great Wall*, 178. In other words, much strife could have been avoided if free trade had been permitted earlier and there is much truth in that, but there was no consensus for that until 1571. The huge cost required to fund what Zeng was proposing is likely the major sticking point that brought him down.
- 49 Rossabi, “The Ming and Inner Asia,” 227–39.
- 50 Waldron, *The Great Wall*, 175.
- 51 Mote, *Imperial China*, 849.
- 52 Mote, *Imperial China*, 849.
- 53 Timothy Brook points out that as early as the 1520s, Wang had become a “lightning rod for faction-formation” in government circles. Those who were jealous of or emulated his ability to formulate “comprehensive solutions to intractable problems” continued to wrangle throughout the Jiajing reign. See “What Happens When Wang Yangming Crosses the Border?” in Diana Lary, ed., *The Chinese State at the Borders* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 78. Also see George Israel’s chapter herein.
- 54 In the spring of 1549, a Vice Minister of War criticized Zhu Wan for using too harsh punishments, which might antagonize barbarians. Drawing attention to the north, he argued it was too risky for China to be punishing barbarians in both the “front and rear.” Higgins, *Pirates and Coastal Defense*, 193.
- 55 That is until the Ming was once again capable of conducting strikes against various Mongol tribes in the late sixteenth century during a period of military revival under Wanli. See Swope, *A Dragon’s Head*, 25. See Teddy Sim, ed., *The Maritime Defence of China: Ming General Qi Jiguang and Beyond* (Singapore: Springer, 2017) for essays on how military innovations finally helped the Ming gain the upper hand over the wokou.
- 56 Swope, “Manifesting Awe,” *infra*, especially 633–4. For symbolic displays of imperial awesomeness, David Robinson, *Martial Spectacles*, provides wonderful examples. As for risks, the ignominious Tumu incident of 1449 was a sufficient case in point. See Frederick Mote, “The T’u-mu Incident of 1449,” in Frank A. Kierman and J.K. Fairbank, eds., *Chinese Ways in Warfare* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), 243–72.
- 57 Waldron, *The Great Wall*, 139.
- 58 DMB, 530 and 1305.
- 59 That is, when Chief Grand Secretary Zhang Juzheng, who had experienced Altan’s raids in the 1550s, began to rebuild defenses and military efficiency. Swope, *A Dragon’s Head*, 23–4.
- 60 Again, see Swope, *A Dragon’s Head* and Swope, *Military Collapse*, for details.

61 Brook, "What Happens When Wang Yangming Crosses the Border?" 76.

PART II

IDEAS



The Ming world was full of ideas about state, society, philosophy, the place of humanity in the world and cosmos, and all manner of other everyday concerns. What distinguishes the Ming from its contemporaries is the degree to which these ideas were written down for posterity. While literacy rates were nowhere near modern standards, it is widely accepted that Ming China was the most literate society in the world at the time and, coupled with the lively printing industry, this meant that items from the mundane to the profound had ready audiences. People wrote about philosophy; they wrote novels, plays and short stories; and they wrote restaurant guides, works on gardening, military manuals, and virtually anything else one can think of. Other ideas were conveyed via mediums such as painting, pottery, or architecture, to name just a few, some of which are also touched upon in essays in other parts of this volume. It is impossible in a book of this length to cover even a fraction of the ideas that circulated through the Ming world, but the essays in this part of the book offer a useful starting point.

In chapter six Kenneth Hammond reminds us that even something so commonplace as a map could have a variety of forms and meanings. For maps not only delineated places and routes; they could serve as

representations of the natural or Buddhist cosmos, the relationship between the human and spirit realms, or the boundaries between civilization and barbarism. The “maps” found in Ming works might also include pictures and diagrams or even simply be pictures or diagrams. Thus, as Hammond notes, they can be seen as texts themselves. So one must always consider the agendas and interests of the mapmaker and the context for which it was produced. In this way maps can be powerful tools for understanding how people in the Ming viewed and depicted their world(s).

As in other spheres in the realm of ideas, maps in the Ming copied and built upon preexisting traditions and models. Thus, we find maps of the whole empire, maps of smaller political units and municipalities, religious maps, military maps, and technical maps such as those used for taxation, flood management, and the like, to name just a few. While the technical qualities of these maps varied considerably, all were designed to communicate “particular kinds of knowledge that would have been understood by their intended audience” according to Hammond. It is impossible to know exactly how all such knowledge was interpreted, but as a whole maps, being found in a variety of mediums and settings, were certainly powerful vehicles for the transmission of ideas and information in the Ming world.

Perhaps most striking for modern readers and comparative historians is Hammond’s discussion of the relationship between maps and gazetteers. Gazetteer production exploded in the Ming period and they became a key place where maps were deployed to convey specific visions of state and society. One gets a sense of how the state and its elites, who usually sponsored or published these gazetteers, sought to project images of order and stability, as well as preserve and highlight local landmarks. The spatial relationship of schools, temples, and government offices, the locations of military garrisons and famous sites or scenic places and the like can all be gleaned from perusing gazetteer maps. Some of these maps also include markers of difference such as images of huts or tents along the fringes of communities to denote the presence of minority, non-Han groups. Significantly, official government buildings, walls, and other symbols of the state and its authority tended to take precedence over private residences, shops, and markets, reflecting the state-oriented view of the realm proffered in most such publications.

Other forms such as atlas collections were also important, especially since these were often produced in response to current events or perceived needs. To use two examples, there was an explosion of coastal maps produced in response to the so-called Japanese pirate (*wokou*) crisis of the southeast in the 1550s–60s, discussed in multiple essays

herein. Many of these maps and their associated textual works were consulted again by Ming officials in the 1590s when they were repairing coastal defenses in anticipation of a full-scale Japanese invasion connected to their military operations in Korea.¹ Then, in the 1620s, there was a movement to produce maps of the northeast and Manchuria in conjunction with activities to counter the rising Latter Jin state of the Jurchens that eventually became the Qing. These map collections are invaluable for military historians and offer a window into the relationship between state initiatives and needs and the production of knowledge in the Ming.

Still other maps were produced for popular consumption, such as maps of markets and city guides for tourists. The increasing production of such maps towards the end of the Ming attests to the vibrant commercial life and the internal mobility of the populace during this era. The further introduction of Jesuit cartographic practices in this era bespeaks the cosmopolitanism of the age as well as changing perceptions of Ming China's place in the wider world.

In chapter seven Ann Waltner introduces the complicated categories of women and religion to our Ming brew. As she rightly notes, there were no concepts of “gender” or “religion” in the Ming in the sense that we understand them today. But both women and religion, as well as religious women and other women operating in religious contexts (such as Tang Saier whose story is related later), were features of everyday life. Indeed, the fabric of everyday life in the Ming was intertwined with religion and religious symbolism and the Ming has been characterized as an “age of faith” by one scholar.² The problem, at least for many men and probably most women, lay in how to interpret the spaces where the domestic and the divine intersected. And even though the categories that we recognize might have been alien to Ming folk, they were intimately familiar with dualities such as *yin* and *yang*, and inner and outer. These helped create the governing principles of society that virtually everyone understood, even if some chose to challenge or undermine these principles.

Waltner highlights how tensions in demands between domestic and religious spheres formed the backdrop to life for many Ming women. These tensions increased as new opportunities opened up for (particularly elite) women in the publishing and religious fields. Yet even as women in the Ming appeared to have greater latitude for such activities, institutions such as footbinding and the cult of widow chastity expanded, suggesting a continuing of patriarchal ideals tied to maintaining order in the domestic sphere.

On the religious side of things, even Guanyin, the Bodhisattva whose transformation from male to female identity is traced by the author, came to represent specific feminine ideals and spheres of interest that helped reinforce basic Chinese family and social structures that were undoubtedly patriarchal at their core. And even orthodox religious observances carried out within the inner quarters could raise anxiety in male circles. Pilgrimages were even more threatening. Yet these were even more interesting for the ways in which they allowed for the mingling of the sexes and social classes, not unlike in contemporary Europe, making them activities that more traditionalist literati criticized. It is certainly not coincidental that dramatic performances, also supposed scenes of licentiousness as discussed by Hsiao Li-ling, were often connected to temples and religious festivals.

Religion also offered an escape for women not interested in following the norms and expectations of society. They could serve as wandering mendicants or establish themselves in Buddhist nunneries. Others could be shamanesses or leaders of new, often heterodox, sects. While such actions may have been frowned upon by mainstream society, they illustrate some of the alternative possibilities open to Ming women. The emergence of female deities such as the Venerable Earth Mother and of new Daoist meditational practices also attest to the new ways in which gender and religion were intersecting in the Ming. But the dominant trope remained the importance of observing one's duties to the family, even in religious contexts. Nonetheless, the nature of Chinese religion and its rich variations allowed for more self-fashioning and greater agency than one might find in the same era in Europe or the Middle East under the Christian and Muslim authorities respectively. Note, however, that Waltner's treatment does not extend to non-Han minorities (see Shin's piece), or Muslim women. This is largely due to the comparative paucity of sources on the latter groups, but avenues for future study are certainly available.

Next, in chapter eight, Yuming He discusses theater and urban culture by examining the Orphan Zhao story. In this essay the interesting ways that Ming cultural sensibilities were affected by and also shaped an ancient story come to the fore. As we have noted previously, much in the Ming, including its artistic output, consciously drew upon earlier models. In the case of drama there was the northern *zaju* tradition, passed down from the Yuan, and the southern tradition, which came into its own in the Ming period. In the process older tales could be transformed to suit new sensibilities and realities, again reflecting the dynamic malleability of Ming society.

In He's discussion of the differences between northern and southern

dramatic traditions it is worth noting how the latter form incorporates more characters reflecting widely disparate social statuses and occupational specialties. This falls in line with the changes taking place in Ming society as a whole, particularly in urban settings, as classes mingled, new blood entered officialdom, and entertainment tastes and fashions influenced one another up and down the social ladder. Additionally, moving the story to an urban setting reflects another transformation taking place during the Ming, again despite the hopes of the founder. This urbanization held both danger and opportunity and the way that roles evolved to account for this new setting serves as a manifestation of the sometimes muddy and problematic nature of such transformations.

Furthermore, the urban details provided by He in reference to the play capture many of the contemporary anxieties about urban spaces and the people who inhabited them. Yet at the same time, like her descriptions of the lantern festivals, they also show why such places and events were attractive to the masses. They provided entertainment, opportunity, and the chance for ordinary people, including con men, to take on aspirational roles.

He's reading demonstrates how a single play can yield valuable information about everything from social relations to popular anxieties to fashion trends, to printing, to the transformation of values and ideals. The transformation of characters and roles within the play as it changed genres also reflects the evolving appreciation of classical stories and heroes in new forms and mediums. And, as He shows, by virtue of dramatic performances, some characters gained classical status and credibility, even if they were never found in actual classical histories or stories. One also gains a sense of the baroque environment of late Ming cities in all their seediness and glory.

Next, in chapter nine, Li-ling Hsiao offers an overview of the relationship between theater and society in the Ming. This was undoubtedly an arena that witnessed profound mingling of ideas as the theater was an entertainment form enjoyed by all segments of society, often simultaneously. It was therefore probably the area wherein high and low culture mingled the most. As Hsiao observes, theater also became a medium for developing cultural literacy and textual consciousness amongst the masses. As seen in Swope's chapter on the peasant rebel Li Dingguo, the heroes of historical dramas such as the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, also published as a novel in the Ming, became archetypes for the entire populace. Their exploits would have been well known to the masses by virtue of the ubiquitous theatrical performances that often coincided with community and temple festivals.

Interestingly, despite his strong belief in the didactic value of the play, *The Lute*, Zhu Yuanzhang (and his more staid officials) sought to curb theatrical performances and their attendant excesses on the pretense of protecting public morality. Happily for both his subjects and later historians and readers, he failed miserably. Future efforts to ban extravagant performances were initiated to no avail and even though over indulgence in theatrical pursuits was often portrayed as morally corrupting and famous actors were sometimes associated with leading monarchs astray, the popularity of the theater at all levels never waned.

Literati life, as seen throughout the present volume, was intimately connected to the theater, both in their sponsorship of troupes and performances, and their incorporation of theatrical events into private leisure activities. The description of these events shows their centrality to elite life and discourse as well as the diversity of performance venues, activities, and styles. These settings also offered opportunities for people of different social statuses to mingle. And, as revealed in Joseph Lam's study of Zhang Dai herein, the theater was a primary vector for the transmission of music, which was, of course, intimately related to theater in the Ming context as noted by Yuming He. By the end of the Ming one could scarcely have a literati gathering without theater and song.

As is the case with mapmaking, studying theater can provide insights into contemporary political debates and issues. In addition to the didactic value that Zhu Yuanzhang found in repeatedly staging *The Lute* for his subjects, much as in contemporary society, we find plays used as satires of groups and individuals. Prime Minister Wen Tiren's brother commissioned *The Green Peony* to satirize members of the Fushe (Restoration Society) for opposing his efforts to join their ranks. Shortly after this, Kong Shangren wrote *The Peach Blossom Fan* to criticize ministers Ruan Dacheng and Ma Shiyong and their domination of the Southern Ming's Hongguang court. The play has gone down as one of the greatest of the entire Ming period and his characterizations of Ruan and Ma are widely accepted as accurate. Incidentally, Ruan himself was an accomplished playwright.

Finally, due to the large number of accounts we have of specific performances, extravaganzas, and temple festivals, we have a vivid picture of what leisure activities were like. Music, food, and the extras of dramatic performance, such as the use of live horses to add realism to shows are all described in such accounts, some of which are expanded upon by Joseph Lam below. This provides us with a sense of theatrical life in China that was comparable to, if not even more lively than, that of Elizabethan England. And, as Hsiao concludes, theater's popularity in

Ming China bridged and blurred the boundaries between social classes and genders.

These are just a few of the ideas emanating from the records of the Ming world and they barely scrape the surface. But they provide a sense of the circulation of knowledge and values and the diversity of mediums available to Ming writers. Their contents also give us a better picture of the lives and interests of common folk than can be found for earlier periods. So even if commoners' voices remain muted or filtered, we gain a heightened sense of their importance in the Ming.

NOTES

- 1 See Kenneth M. Swope, "Cutting Dwarf Pirates Down to Size: Amphibious Warfare in Sixteenth-Century East Asia," in Maochun Yu, ed. *New Interpretations in Naval History: Selected Papers from the Fifteenth Naval History Symposium* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2009), 81–110.
- 2 See Victoria Cass, *Dangerous Women: Warriors, Grannies and Geishas of the Ming* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), 67.

CHAPTER 6

CARTOGRAPHY IN THE MING



Kenneth J. Hammond

The making, publishing, and distribution of maps were integral parts of the information culture of imperial China, with a long history and a wide range of practices. The idea of a map is not a simple or straightforward thing in Chinese culture, as there existed a broad spectrum of graphic imagery which was grouped under the term *tu*. Some such images would be clearly recognizable to a modern Western viewer as what we think of as a map, while others might seem more like a picture or a diagram. Scholars of cartography offer a variety of definitions of what constitutes a map, and there is some consensus on core features. For the purposes of this essay a map will be defined as a graphic representation of a physical space which provides some selected information to allow a viewer to understand that space in a particular way. How a map is rendered involves decisions about what to include as well as what will be excluded in the image, and these decisions can be affected by a multiplicity of factors, agendas or interests on the part of the cartographer, the sponsor of an image, or the publisher or distributor of a map, either as a separate item or as part of a larger text or other compiled product.¹

Maps can be seen as texts in themselves, and are often either produced

with written text integrated into the image space or in conjunction with larger textual creations. Maps can cover a large space such as a country, a region or the world itself, or focus more closely on a smaller territory such as a province, a county, city or even a specific site such as a temple or school. Maps can serve as records of information, and also as means of constructing an understanding of place, within political or other interested agendas. Maps have been used in military operations, as instruments of political administration and assertions of control over territorial spaces, as guides for travelers or to promote awareness of the geographic or economic features of a locale. Maps are cultural constructions, and as such need to be understood and interpreted within the social and historical contexts of their appearance.²

A BRIEF SURVEY OF CHINESE CARTOGRAPHY

Maps have a long history in China, though the number of maps surviving from before the Song dynasty (960–1279) is quite small. References to maps in written works go back to at least the Warring States period (475–221 BCE). Chinese thinkers and practitioners developed their own theoretical discourse about cartography, with figures such as Pei Xiu (224–71 CE) presenting guidelines for the production of geographic images. In the Tang (618–907) a number of significant maps were produced by cartographers such as Jia Dan (730–805) and Li Jifu (c. 814), though these all have been lost. The use of grid systems to produce maps of the empire was part of Chinese cartographic practice at least since the Han (202 BCE–220 CE), and is associated with Zhang Heng (first century CE), who was also an important astronomer. The theory and practice of cartography advanced through a process of innovation and accumulation of knowledge over more than a millennium through the end of the Tang, but it was in the Song dynasty that map making and the circulation of cartographic images underwent a great expansion.³

The Song was a time of dramatic change in many aspects of Chinese life. The dynasty was founded after a long period of warfare and social upheaval, which had destroyed the aristocratic social and economic order characteristic of the middle period of Chinese history, from the Han through the Tang. To stabilize their new dynasty the founding emperors, the brothers Zhao Kuangyin and Zhao Kuangyi (r. 960–75 and 976–97), implemented the Confucian civil examination system to recruit officials to serve in the imperial administration. This led to the consolidation of a new elite culture based on education and service in office.⁴

In the course of the Song there were also significant developments in the economic and social life of the empire. A dynamic commercial economy grew rapidly in the Jiangnan region, and extended its influence throughout the empire as time passed. Regional specialization in the production of certain goods, such as textiles, tea or ceramics, fueled the growth of long-distance trade both within the empire and internationally. Technological developments in woodblock printing and the growth of commercial publishing drove a process of expansion in the circulation of knowledge and increasing literacy.⁵

The amount of cartographic material surviving from the Song represents a great leap from previous times. The extant works include stone stelae, painted images, and most abundantly, woodblock printed sheets and bound volumes. The latter category includes a vast number of gazetteers, volumes of information about localities ranging from counties and prefectures up through provincial level units to the empire as a whole. These came to form a major portion of printed publications, and regularly contained maps. Gazetteers were generally produced by official agents, from local magistrates up to the imperial central government, but especially at the lower levels they also often reflected the interests and input of local elites.⁶

A variety of maps surviving from the Song give a good sense of the kinds of images which could be produced, both technically and conceptually. These included maps of the empire as a whole such as the *Yuji tu* (Figure 6.1) and the *Huayi tu* (Figure 6.2), both dating from the 1130s, maps of smaller parts of the empire such as the *Luguo zhi tu* of 1154, or even of a single city such as the map of Suzhou, known then as Pingjiang, from 1229 (Figure 6.3). All of these were carved on stelae. Stele maps were public documents, which could be viewed by most people, and from which rubbings could be taken, which allowed for these images to circulate well beyond the site of their placement. Painted maps, such as one of the temples at Wutaishan, were part of a specifically Buddhist cartographic tradition. Maps included in gazetteers covered areas from the empire as a whole to the lowest administrative districts, or illustrated important sites such as temples or schools. Other maps might show a system of water management or record the layout of a major institution such as a monastery.

Some images were produced with great technical accuracy, such as the Suzhou map, which clearly represents the layout of streets and canals in the city in the wake of a program of urban renewal undertaken by the local magistrate.⁷ The Chinese had a highly developed technology of surveying, using poles with graduated markings, sighting boards, plumb lines and water levels. Using these tools Chinese surveyors could

accurately establish the height of hills or mountains, the width of streams, and could determine and record distances either by direct measurement or through mathematical calculation. These techniques had been elaborated in the writings of scholars like Shen Kuo during the Northern Song dynasty, and were widely practiced and understood.⁸ None the less, other maps could often embody representative techniques which were not “scientifically” precise, yet served to communicate particular kinds of knowledge in ways which were comprehensible to the viewer, often in conjunction with texts containing more specific and elaborate information. These modes of illustration and representation had evolved over time and remained relatively stable in later times. They provided a repertoire of visual representation which offered cartographers great range in the transmission of geographic and social information.

CARTOGRAPHIC TRADITIONS IN THE MING

In the Ming dynasty cartography carried forward many of the techniques and practices which had been developed in earlier times, and also saw the further expansion of both the quantity of map production and the extension of the variety of uses to which cartographic creations were put. This chapter will consider both the increase in the production and circulation of maps and the multiple agendas for which they were made. Towards the end of the dynasty the arrival of Western missionaries brought new cartographic ideas and techniques to China, and the impact these had will also be considered.

GAZETTEERS

As had been the case in the Song dynasty, one of the most important venues for the appearance of maps was the gazetteer. The Ming saw a large increase in the number of gazetteers being published. As Joe Dennis has noted, it was a regular pattern that there was a large number of gazetteers published in the years following the establishment of the Song, Yuan and Ming dynasties, as the stabilization of new administrative orders needed information about economic, social and cultural conditions in local or provincial contexts. Throughout the Ming, gazetteers continued to be produced, especially at the local level, by the actions of administrators. But local elites also played significant roles in the compilation and organization of information to be included in gazetteers, and the editorial process could be a complex field of negotiation among a diversity of interests and agendas, official and

private. From the middle of the sixteenth century on there was an even more dramatic increase in the printing of gazetteers as part of an overall explosion of publishing, both commercial and official.

Ming gazetteers included maps of local geographic features, often showing the relationship between a town, prefecture or county and its neighboring administrative districts. Maps could also show important sites such as local academies or Buddhist temples. Famous scenic spots might be depicted. Roadways and bridges might be highlighted, and maps of water control systems were common. In general, maps in gazetteers served to illustrate information that was given much fuller exposition in the textual portion of the publication, which constituted the vast majority of the contents. Maps needed to be sufficiently clear and accurate to allow the reader to understand spatial relationships between places, but did not seek the kind of precise delineation of space which was rendered in the 1229 Suzhou stele map. The characteristic quality of geographic approximation in gazetteer maps was not due to a lack of technological capability, but was a function of the subordination of cartographic imagery to textual exposition.

The visual presentation of geographic information took a variety of forms. Images of towns, temples or schools were often in the form known to cartographers as the ichnographic view, seeming to look down upon a site from directly above, in a way which seems to the modern Western viewer to be clearly a map. In other instances the image might be rendered more as a bird's eye view, from an elevated position, but in a more pictorial manner. In whatever form an image was presented there were always decisions made as to what would be included in the view and what would be excluded. Maps of prefectural or county administrative centers routinely included depictions of government offices and state institutions like academies or granaries, as well as important public buildings such as major shrines or temples. City walls and gates, waterways within or surrounding the town were normally part of the map. But residential spaces or private gardens, though they often were important in the social and cultural life of the local elite, were generally not included. Shops and markets were similarly not normally represented.

Gazetteers were produced at different levels of the administrative hierarchy. The most numerous were local gazetteers for a prefecture or county. Provincial gazetteers often aggregated materials, including maps, from the lower units under their authority. Maps of a province as a whole would also be produced specifically for the provincial gazetteer. At the top of the hierarchy were a small number of gazetteers covering the empire as a whole. In terms of cartographic practices, the *Da Ming*

yitong zhi, published in 1461 in 90 *juan*, became a standard geographical reference work. This was largely due to the fact that this work was produced under direct imperial sponsorship, and was widely distributed to administrative offices at all levels of the hierarchy, throughout the empire. Copies of this edition were even sent to neighboring states and influenced geographic and cartographic knowledge and practices around the East Asian region. It was also reproduced in privately printed editions, which further enhanced its distribution, influence, and survival.

MAP COLLECTIONS

While gazetteers were the greatest venues for the appearance of cartographic images during the Ming, maps were also produced in many other forms. Closely related to the gazetteer genre was the publication of collections of maps as atlases. Perhaps the most important example of this is the *Guang yutu* (Figure 6.4), compiled by Luo Hongxian over three years in the 1540s and first printed in 1553.⁹ Luo produced the map in the context of rising military concerns about raids on the east coast and the lack of useful geographic information for planning defense operations. He based his atlas on an earlier compilation from the Yuan, the *Yudi tu*, which had been put together by Zhu Siben. Zhu's work had made use of the method of drawing a map using a grid system, which had earlier precedents in the Song and was described by Pei Xiu more than a thousand years before Zhu's efforts. This was not a system of longitude and latitude, but rather a technique for providing a consistent scale for the features represented within the cartographic space. Luo continued the use of this system in the maps he included in the *Guang yutu*.

Luo's atlas included over one hundred maps, among which were maps of sixteen provinces, several border regions, the Yellow River, the Grand Canal, and maps of maritime routes along the coast. This atlas was reproduced many times, with many variations on the specific maps included, so that no two surviving editions are identical. Despite these differences, the cartographic information included in the *Guang yutu* became critically important in Ming and later mapping. One particular aspect of Luo's work was that he developed a standard set of symbols for representing geographic features on his maps. He included a list of twenty-four of these in the compilation. These did not, however, become widely used by other cartographers.

Luo Hongxian's concern with the security of the coast was further developed by Zheng Ruozeng in the later 1550s.¹⁰ In 1560 Zheng

completed a study of coastal defenses which included a large number of maps. This was published in 1562 as the *Chouhai tubian* (Figure 6.5). This was a work devoted to the comprehensive mapping of the China coast, with maps of segments of coast in great detail. Unlike Luo Hongxian's maps, these did not use a grid system or bear any indication of scale. Maps of Japan were also included, since coastal raiders often included Japanese merchants and adventurers. Zheng drew upon a large number of previous works, beyond Luo Hongxian's, and included a list of works consulted, among which were some twenty previous atlases, gazetteers or other specific maps. This is a good indication of the richness of cartographic production during the Ming. Like the *Guang yutu*, Zheng's *Chouhai tubian* became a model for later coastal and maritime maps. Though it was privately produced it was widely used by government and military officials. And like Luo's work it was reproduced in many later editions.

Coastal defense was not the only area of strategic concern which elicited significant cartographic production. The northern and northwestern border regions also were mapped at various levels of detail. In 1537 a map of the Nine Frontier Regions *Jiubian tu*, along with an essay commenting on the contents of the map, was submitted to the Jiajing emperor by Xu Lun, a rising official who would go on to have a significant career in border defense.¹¹ It was published in a woodblock edition the next year. The map showed the border garrisons from Liaoning in the east to Jiayu Pass in the west, showing geographic features like mountains and rivers as well as the location of garrisons and the line of the Great Wall. The original is lost, but a later copy on silk in twelve panels is held in the Liaoning Provincial Museum. Maps from Xu Lun's work were later included in Luo Hongxian's atlas.

More detailed maps of specific areas were also produced, some in the 1530s and some later in the Jiajing reign, such as the *Shaanxi Zhenzhanshou tulue*. These were maps printed on paper, bound into volumes, showing fortifications, mountain passes, rivers and other natural features, and providing information about distances between garrisons and other military facilities. These were official publications used by military and civil officials along the northwestern frontier during the period of heightened threats from the Mongols in the mid-sixteenth century.

Military affairs were of great concern to the Ming state, and fostered major cartographic efforts especially through the sixteenth century, but officials also used maps in other areas of administrative concern, a good example of which was water management. Perhaps the greatest surviving example of this genre is the Map of Flood-Prevention Work on

the Yellow River, produced in the Wanli era (1573–1620).¹² This map was engraved on stelae in multiple sections, with a combined length of just over 20 meters. It shows the entire length of the Yellow River from its origins in Qinghai to the Yellow Sea. Along the way it shows dykes, dams, sluice gates, bridges and other structures, often giving the date of construction, as well as noting information about the dates of breaches and the location of sections considered vulnerable to further breaks. In addition to the stelae original, the map was also reproduced in colored print versions on paper, joined together into scrolls.¹³ This map is highly pictorial in nature, with some buildings or natural features drawn as if seen from an elevated angle, more or less a bird's-eye view, while sites like towns are drawn as if being viewed from directly above. The flow of water in the rivers is represented by curling lines, while in the main stream of the Yellow River waves with foamy crests are illustrated.

Maps of water management projects on a more local scale were also produced. One such map, also of the Yellow River, is the *Huanghe tushuo*.¹⁴ This was engraved on a stele in 1536, and shows the river as it flows east across the north China plain, with particular attention to the interconnections between the Yellow River, the Grand Canal and the Huai River. Dykes and dams are shown, and the boundaries of administrative units are given, along with the locations of some important places. Notes along the top of the stele record information about the dates of construction of the dykes, when sections of the river were dredged, and details of water management work along this section of the river since the beginning of the Ming.

Another good example, again carved on a stele to be a public record, is a map of the Shaoxing Prefecture water system, engraved between 1479 and 1482.¹⁵ The focus here is a much smaller area, a single prefecture in Zhejiang Province. This was an area in which water management had been of great significance in developing the rice economy from the eleventh century on, and the maintenance of hydraulic systems was vital to the prosperity of this locality. The map shows the course of the main waterway in the region, the Cao'e River, as well as more than 130 lakes and ponds. It also showed tide bulwarks, weirs, floodgates and dykes, though many of these features are no longer clearly recognizable on the surviving stele. Cities and towns as well as connecting roadways are illustrated. The reverse side of the stele is engraved with an essay discussing the history of water conservancy in the prefecture.

The vast majority of maps produced for official purposes, whether in gazetteers, on stelae, or in other formats, in compilations or atlases, was concerned with the management of terrestrial affairs. But mapping the

heavens was also a subject of interest. The linkages and interactions between events in the celestial realm and the human world had been explored and analyzed throughout Chinese history, and the Imperial State assumed great responsibilities for regulating information about the heavens, including calendars and other astronomical activities. Celestial cartography did not occupy a large place in official mapping practice, but one example will illustrate the kind of work that was produced. In 1506 a local magistrate in Changshu County, Jiangsu, had a map of the heavens engraved on a stele. The *Tianwen tu* was largely a copy of a map with the same name, which had been carved in Suzhou in the Song dynasty, though with some updating of astronomical information.¹⁶ The map shows the sky in circular form, centered on the northern celestial pole. Stars are shown in constellations, and a text at the bottom of the stele gives the names of stars and their groupings. As with other officially produced stele maps, this one was meant to serve as a public document, providing information about the heavens and demonstrating the proper order which the State aimed to maintain.

MAPS AND MARKETS

The Ming dynasty, especially from the late fifteenth century on, was a period of rapid economic expansion in China. The commercial economy, which had flourished in the Song, had contracted during the turmoil of the Mongol conquests, and had been intentionally marginalized by the first Ming emperor Zhu Yuanzhang. But by the 1480s or so markets were reviving, regional specialization in production was advancing, and trade both across the empire and with the wider world began to grow as the Chinese economy became increasingly monetized. Silver flowed into the country, first from Japan and then from the Spanish mines in the New World. The rapid development of a commodity economy had dramatic impacts on many aspects of Ming culture, including cartography. The growth of commercial publishing and improvements in print technologies included a dynamic expansion of map production, not only in official forms such as we have considered this far, but in private publication as well. The concerns of official and commercial publications sometimes coincided, and sometimes went their separate ways.

One aspect of social change which accompanied commercial development in the Ming was increased mobility. People traveled across the empire for many different reasons, sometimes on official business, sometimes as traders, but also increasingly for enjoyment, as what today we would call tourists. Maps as sources of geographic information,

often in conjunction with textual materials, began to appear more and more to serve the needs and interests of travelers. Some of these were created by local officials, and may be seen as efforts to promote tourism in their administrative units. A good example is a map of Dengfeng county in Henan, erected by the county magistrate in 1593.¹⁷ The map is pictorial, providing a bird's-eye view of the area, with mountains and rivers, the county seat, and many temples and other important sites for visiting shown. Dengfeng county was famous for its Daoist and Buddhist temples, including the Shaolin temple, the Forest of Stupas, and the Songyang Academy, among many more. The stele could serve as a guide to the scenic and historic sites of the county, and rubbings could be taken as souvenirs. Another example of a stele illustrating a tourist site, slightly earlier, is one of the Jimen Hot Springs, a resort near the Great Wall north of Beijing.¹⁸ This was engraved in 1577, and shows the resort area in a diagrammatic format, with a more pictorial image of the mountains rising behind it, topped by a dramatic rendering of the Great Wall. Caves, pagodas, and images of stelae on the hillsides are included.

Travel to scenic spots such as Dengfeng County or the Jimen Hot Springs was one form of early tourism in China, but cities also began to be seen as places to be explored and enjoyed. Maps of cities had always been a component of gazetteers, generally with a focus on showing the locations of administrative offices and perhaps some major landmarks for orientation. But in the mid- to late sixteenth century new kinds of maps, sometimes as part of larger textual works and sometimes as separate publications, began to appear, providing information specifically intended for travelers, or even residents, who wished to know more about the attractions of urban places. Two maps of the capital can serve to illustrate this development.

In 1560 a retired official of the Embroidered Uniform Guard, Zhang Jue, who was a favorite of the Jiajing emperor and had served in the capital for some forty years, published a short guide to Beijing, *Record of the Wards, Lanes and Hutongs of the Five Districts of the Capital*.¹⁹ This was a comprehensive description of the neighborhoods of the city, listing 33 wards, and giving the names of hundreds of streets, along with information about the temples, government offices, shops and markets which could be found along them. Zhang also included information about the Eight Scenic Spots of the Capital, some of which were outside the city walls. Zhang included a map of the city at the beginning of the book (Figure 6.6). This map is not a geographically precise image of the city, being distorted in its representation of the physical shape of the urban space, which appears longer east to west than north to south. But within the map's frame the placement of the names of the wards is accurate, and Zhang provides visual representations of the walls and

gates of the city, the important *pailou* landmarks on the east and west sides of town, and shows the Bell and Drum Towers north of the Imperial Palace, and the Altars of Heaven and Earth in the southern city. Outside the walls there are pictorial renditions of the Juyong Pass, the Western Hills, the Lugou Bridge, and the Dongyue Temple, all important tourist sites.

In a preface Zhang wrote that his intention in publishing this work was to allow a visitor or resident to view “the breadth of the city, the traces of the old and the new. . . as if held in one’s hand. The spread of lanes and alleys across tens of *li* can be known without leaving one’s door.” Zhang’s text and map can be seen as the first guidebook to Beijing. This was a new form of cartographic production emerging to address the growing market for travel information.

Another map of Beijing, printed around 1580, is an even greater illustration of the development of new cartographic forms to address the needs and interests of the marketplace. This is a broadsheet, which survives in a single copy held in the library of Sendai University in Japan, measures one meter in length and half a meter in width, published as a stand-alone object, apparently aimed at a popular audience well beyond the limits of the official or commercial elites. At the heart of Beijing, the Imperial capital, was the Forbidden City, also known as the Great Within. This was the center of government administration, but perhaps more importantly the residence of the emperor. Ordinary subjects were not allowed entry to this space, and even high officials could not go into the private areas of the palace, where the women of the imperial household and their eunuch attendants dwelt. Chinese popular culture was rich in stories and legends about the mysteries of the inner palace. Most maps of capital cities, going back to Hangzhou or Chang’an, as well as Beijing, do not represent the Great Within in any detail. Indeed, even a map like that in Zhang Jue’s guidebook gives only the barest indication of the features of the palace, showing a series of building rooflines along the central axis running through the city and the palace. The broadsheet, which bears the title *Beijing cheng gongdian zhi tu* (Figure 6.7), presents a highly pictorial view of the city, within which the interior of the palace is rendered in great, albeit imaginative, detail.

The geographic space of Beijing is distorted in this map, as in Zhang Jue’s, though here the distortion is both an elongation north to south, and a disproportion in the amount of space occupied by the palace within the overall urban area. The map is rich in detail, with the city walls and gates marked, as well as many buildings and streets, which would have been familiar to anyone acquainted with the city. But about

half the visual space is taken up with the Imperial City and the palace, at the center of which is a remarkable image of the emperor himself, seated at a table with papers and writing implements on it. He is accompanied by attendants and officials, with burly guards standing nearby. On a scroll which the emperor appears to be working on are written the words *Tianxia taiping* meaning Great Peace under Heaven. Thus the emperor is seen to be hard at work, ensuring the good governance of the realm.

Across the top of the broadsheet is a list of all the Ming reigns up to that of the Wanli emperor, who ascended the throne in 1573, though not including the second Ming emperor. This, plus other evidence internal to the map, indicates that the image was drawn sometime in the 1550s, and printed around 1580. This broadsheet, which survives in a single copy in the library of Tohoku University in Japan, would have been sold as a kind of souvenir or as a popular image revealing the secrets of life in the imperial palace, though in a very respectful, indeed idealized way. This kind of fantasy image, embedded within a detailed representation of the capital, was a fully commodified object, produced not for any official, administrative purpose, nor as a tool for navigating the lanes and alleys of the city, but as a form of popular entertainment, designed to fulfil the curiosity of the consumer.

MAPS AND THE EXTENSION OF KNOWLEDGE

Most of the maps which have been considered thus far, with the exception of the celestial image, have been focused on space within the empire. Maps of the empire as a whole, and of China within a larger geographic context, were also produced during the Ming, and towards the end of the dynasty the arrival of new geographic knowledge, brought by Jesuit missionaries, began to transform the Chinese understanding of the larger world. A map drawn by Yang Ziqi around 1512, which was reproduced in 1526, shows the state of empire-wide cartographic images before any contact with Western mapping culture.²⁰ The famous Korean *Gangnido* map, from the fifteenth century, which drew on Chinese models from the Mongol Yuan dynasty, themselves enriched by Islamic geographic and cartographic knowledge, includes Africa and Europe, and is the earliest surviving world map from East Asia. It served in part as the basis for the comprehensive maps which were included in the *Guangyu tu* discussed above.

When Jesuit missionaries, most notably Matteo Ricci, began their work in China in the final decades of the sixteenth century, one of the bundles of knowledge they brought with them was the European

awareness of global geography which had been developed during the Age of Encounters from the late fifteenth century on. Ricci and others brought with them copies of European books and maps, including the world map of Abraham Ortelius from 1570. In 1584 Ricci began to produce world maps for the Chinese, the most famous of which is his 1602 *Kunyu wanguo quantu* (Figure 6.8), which survives in many copies and versions. Ricci's map presented a view of the world that was divergent from the traditional Chinese understanding. The inclusion of the Western Hemisphere and the vast extent of the oceans was difficult for many Chinese to understand. Ricci's map circulated widely, especially among the literati elite, but it does not appear to have had an immediate significant impact on Chinese cartographic understanding. As noted above, Chinese geographers and cartographers already had some awareness of the larger Eurasian and African landmasses, through the intermediary influence of Islamic maps, which had come into China in significant numbers during the Mongol era.²¹ Ricci's maps elaborated on this base, and added considerable information about the New World, but they were not completely unprecedented. Ricci's maps showed China as one country among many, not as the center of the world, but even this was not entirely new. Indeed, Buddhist cartographers had long portrayed a world that was not centered on China, but rather on the sacred Kunlun Mountain, somewhere in the distant west beyond China's borders.

By the time of the transition from the Ming to the Qing dynasties Jesuit cartographic practices began to have a greater influence on Chinese mapping, as Western astronomical knowledge was also being assimilated to Chinese purposes. But the impact of Ricci's maps and of Western geographic information generally was not as dramatic or transformative in the late Ming as has sometimes been suggested.

Two final maps can serve to close out the history of Ming cartography and to emphasize how diverse the practices and producers of map making were. In 1659, 15 years after the fall of the Ming, a map of what today we would call East and Southeast Asia was deposited in the Bodleian Library at Oxford University as part of a collection of papers bequeathed by the English lawyer John Selden. It lay more or less forgotten until the early twentieth century, though some efforts were made to understand its contents late in the seventeenth century. When it was noticed again, it became the subject of great interest to historians such as Robert Batchelor and Timothy Brook.²² The map is large, measuring about a meter and half in length and a meter in width. It shows a large geographic area, from Java in the south to beyond the Great Wall in the north, and from Japan and the western Pacific to the Bay of Bengal. In many ways it resembles maps of the coastlines

produced for the defense atlases discussed earlier. But it also possesses unique features, such as the delineation of maritime trade routes. Scholarly opinion dates the map to the beginning of the seventeenth century, the late Ming. There is no indication of who produced it, or exactly why, though the fact that it seems to have come into Selden's possession via mercantile connections in Java suggests it served as a part of the far-flung commercial networks maintained by Chinese traders as part of the great expansion of the later Ming economy.

The Selden map, as it has come to be known, combines some features of European cartography, such as the compass rose, with the rich traditions of Chinese map making. When it was produced it was the most accurate map of the region yet produced, and would not be surpassed for four decades. It remains something of a mysterious object. A short time after the Selden map was drawn, a military official named Mao Yuanyi submitted a major collection of materials on military affairs, the *Wubei zhi*, to the Chongzhen emperor.²³ This included a 20-page chart showing the routes of the great fleets commanded by the eunuch Zheng He between 1403 and 1435.²⁴ These voyages went from the eastern coast of China through Southeast Asia and across the Indian Ocean to the Persian Gulf, Red Sea and East Africa. Much of the territory covered in the Selden map is also portrayed in the Zheng He charts, yet these maps were produced entirely in the semi-pictorial style typical of maps in gazetteers. The contrast in how the maritime world and its continental setting were represented highlights the complexity of cartographic production in the Ming. Cartography in China would continue to develop in the Qing dynasty; some Chinese maps would come to resemble their Western counterparts, while others carried on in more traditional representative modes down to the end of the imperial era at the beginning of the twentieth century.

CONCLUSION

Cartography in the Ming was a dynamic arena of cultural production. Maps served many purposes, and were produced to promote a wide range of interests and agendas, from government administration to civic pride, tourism, and entertainment. The Chinese were capable of precise technical accuracy, but also produced maps which clearly diverged from the direct representation of geographic space in order to emphasize other aspects of visual presentation. The rapid growth of the commercial economy greatly expanded the production and circulation of geographic knowledge and its cartographic depiction. By the end of the Ming new information and ideas from outside China began to reconfigure the ways

at least some Chinese thought about their place in the world.

NOTES

- 1 The most definitive work on the history of cartography in China is the essays by Cordell D. K. Yee in J. B. Harley and David Woodward, eds., *The History of Cartography*, Vol. II, Book 2, *Cartography in East and Southeast Asian Societies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). An earlier and still influential view is Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, Vol. 3, section 22, “Geography and Cartography,” (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959).
- 2 For general theoretical understandings of maps and cartography see, *inter alia* J.B. Harley, *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).
- 3 Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, 537–51.
- 4 Denis C. Twitchett and Paul Jakov Smith, eds., *Cambridge History of China*, Vol. V, Part 1, *The Five Dynasties and Sung China and its Precursors* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
- 5 William Guanglin Liu, *The Chinese Market Economy 1000–1500* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2015).
- 6 Joseph Dennis, *Writing, Publishing, and Reading Local Gazetteers in Imperial China, 1100–1700* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015).
- 7 Olivia Milburn, *Urbanization in Early and Medieval China: Gazetteers for the City of Suzhou* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015), 26, 217.
- 8 Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, 569–79.
- 9 L. Carrington Goodrich and Chaoying Fang, comp., *Dictionary of Ming Biography* (hereafter *DMB*) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 980–84.
- 10 *DMB*, 204–8.
- 11 *DMB*, 593–5. A number of the maps mentioned below are reproduced, in whole or in part, in Yan Ping *et al.*, *China in Ancient and Modern Maps* (London: Sotheby’s Publications, 1998) (hereafter Sotheby’s). Xu Lun’s *Jiubain tu* is on 112–15.
- 12 Sotheby’s, 120–21.
- 13 Sotheby’s, 122–5.
- 14 Sotheby’s, 98–99.
- 15 Sotheby’s, 92–3.
- 16 Sotheby’s, 94–5.
- 17 Sotheby’s, 128–9.
- 18 Sotheby’s, 118–19.
- 19 A modern reprint was published by Guji chubanshe in Beijing in 1987.
- 20 Sotheby’s, 96–7.
- 21 Hyunhee Park, *Mapping the Chinese and Islamic Worlds: Cross-Cultural Exchange in Pre-modern Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
- 22 Timothy Brook, *Mr. Selden’s Map of China: Decoding the Secrets of a Vanished Cartographer* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013). Robert Batchelor, *London: The Selden Map and the Making of a Global City, 1549–1689* (Chicago, IL:

University of Chicago Press, 2014).

23 DMB, 1053-4.

24 Sotheby's, 146-7.

FIGURES



Figure 6.1 *Yuji tu*, Author's photo

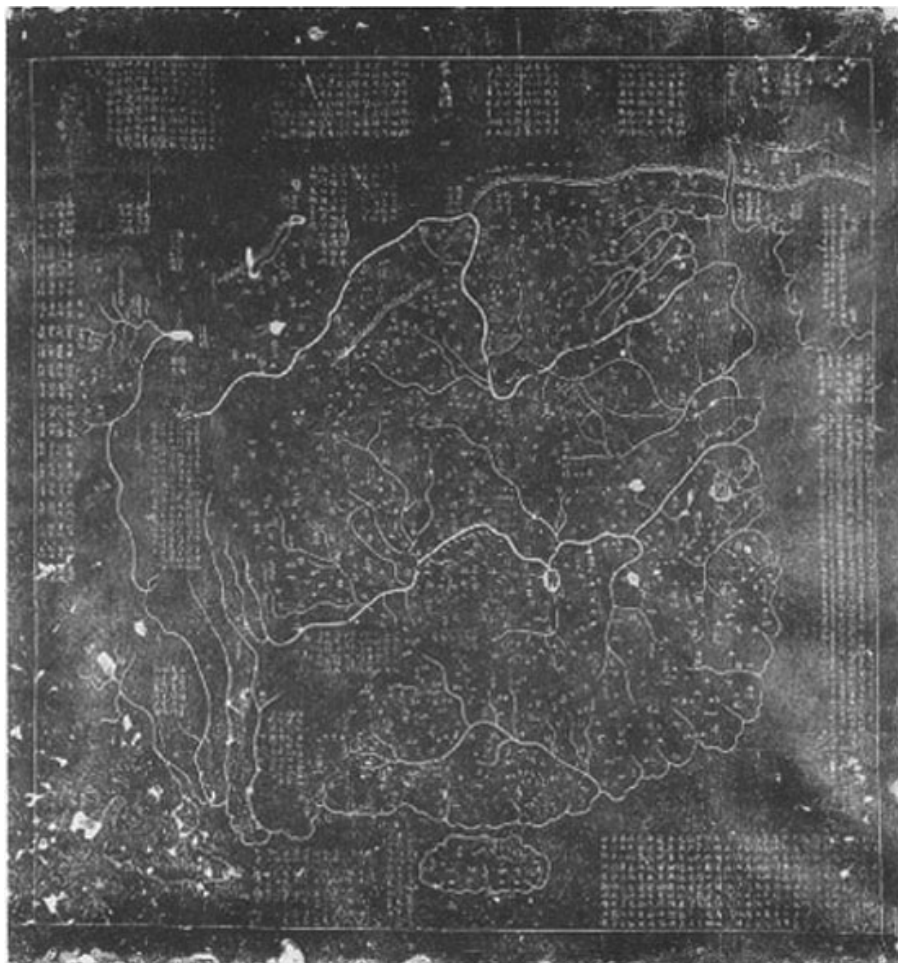


Figure 6.2 *Huayi tu*, Author's photo

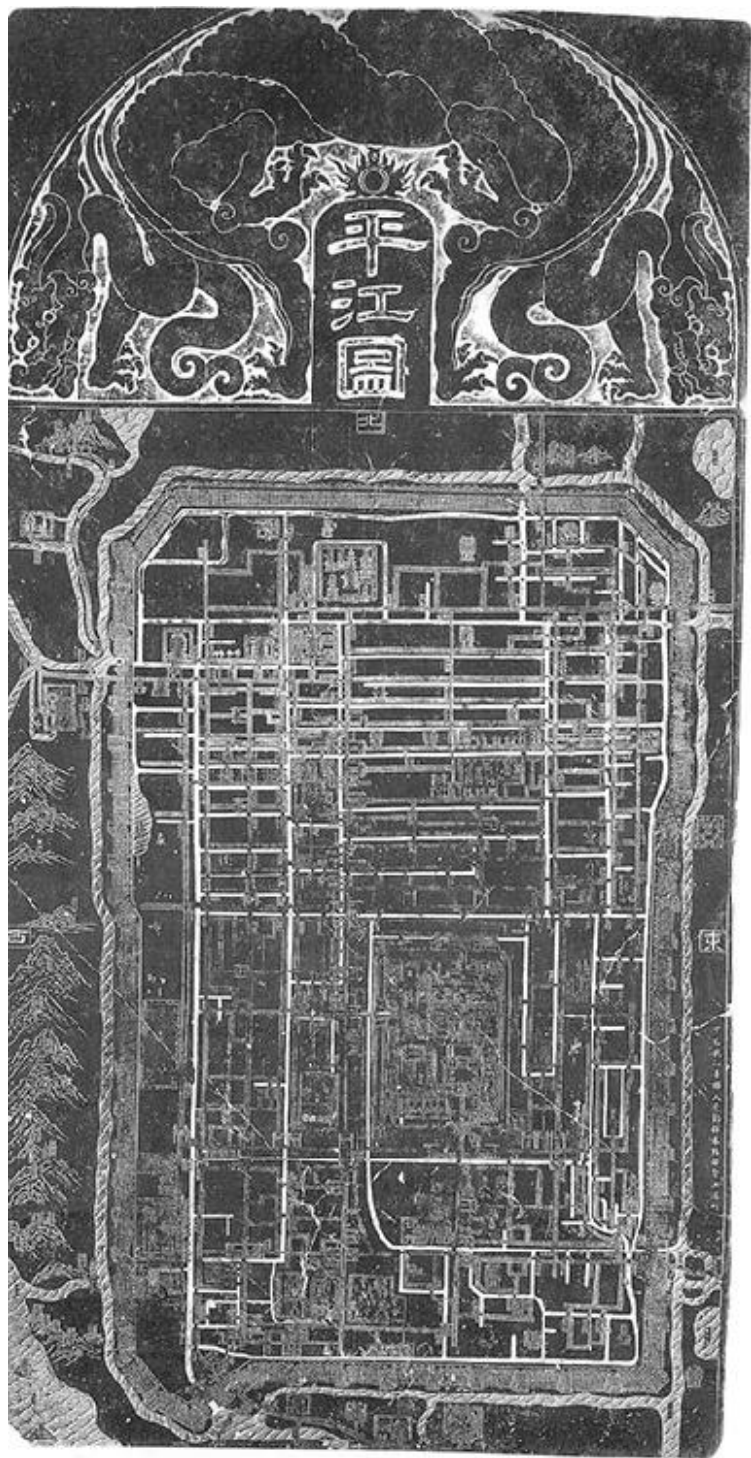


Figure 6.3 *Pingjiang tu*, Author's photo



Figure 6.5 *Chouhai tubian*, Zheng Ruozeng and Hu Zongxian, ed. by Li Zhizhong. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2007

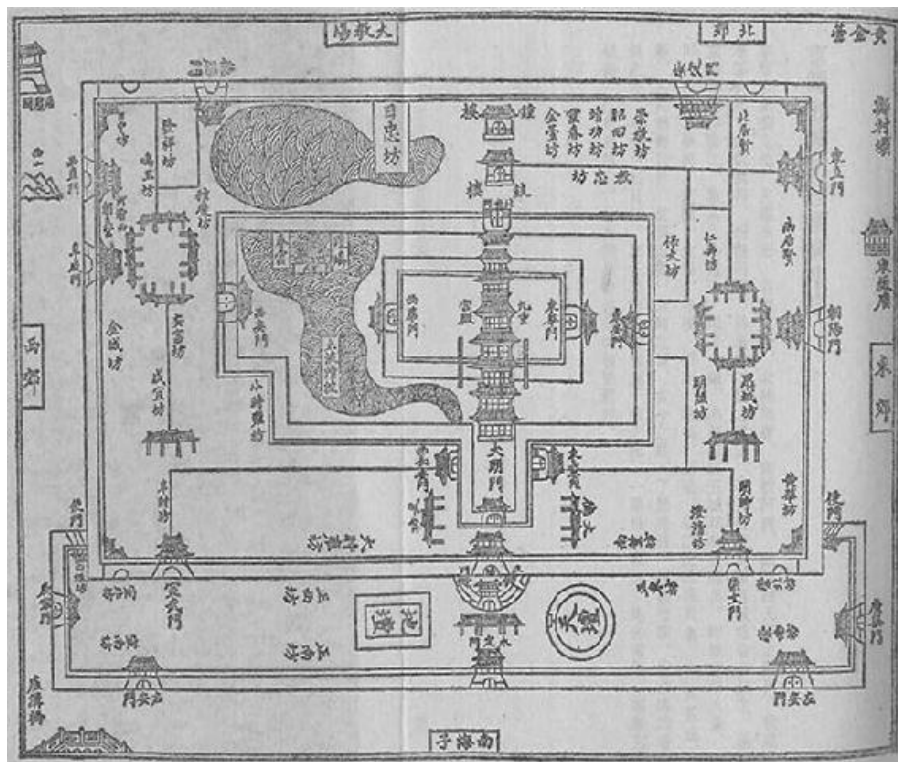


Figure 6.6 *Jingshi wucheng fangxiang hutong ji*, Zhang Jue. Beijing: Beijing guji chubanshe, 1982

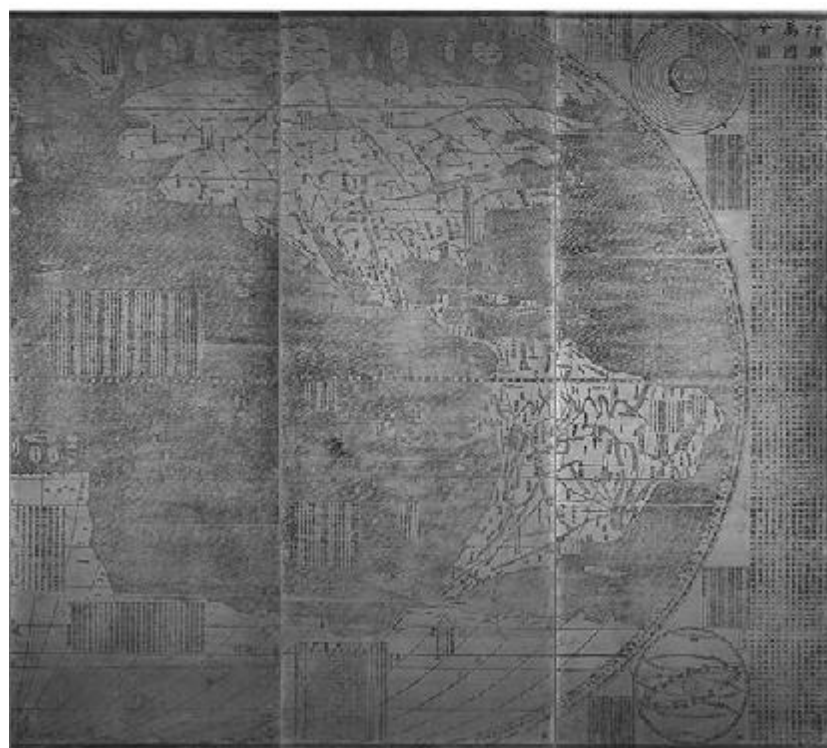
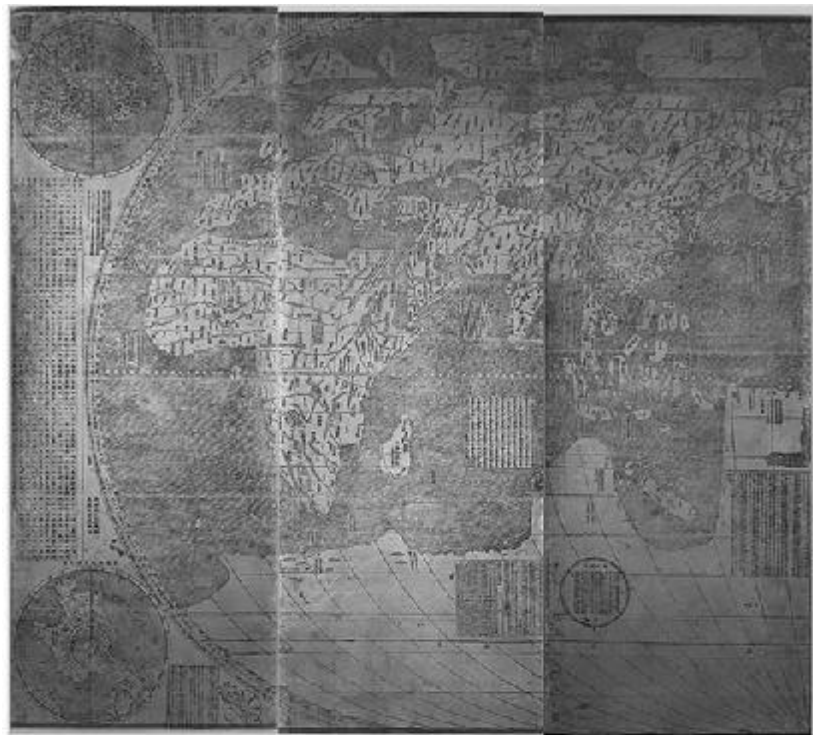


Figure 6.8(a and b) *Kunyu wanguo quantu*, Public domain: <https://>

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kunyu_Wanguo_Quantu#/media/
File:Kunyu_Wanguo_Quantu_by_Matteo_Ricci_Plate_1-3.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kunyu_Wanguo_Quantu#/media/File:Kunyu_Wanguo_Quantu_by_Matteo_Ricci_Plate_1-3.jpg)

CHAPTER 7

GENDER AND RELIGION IN THE MING



Ann Waltner

There was no concept of gender and no concept of religion in Ming China, but men still became anxious when women went to temples. No one objected when women practiced devotions quietly in the domestic sphere, but more public professions of devotion, especially among women of the elite, caused some consternation.¹ Ming people were interested in questions having to do with men and women, and questions having to do with humans and deities, but the conceptual frameworks that they used differ from those we use today. Nonetheless, it is productive to borrow those frameworks to look at the late Ming.

The key question I want to explore in this essay is the intersection of gender and religion or, to put it another way, the intersection of the domestic and the divine.² While the concept of gender might have been foreign to Ming people, the concepts of yin and yang and inner and outer were central to their thinking about the social and the divine, the cosmic, and the domestic. The universe was governed by principles of *yin* and *yang*, which corresponded roughly to female and male. Society was governed by principles of inner and outer, which corresponded roughly to the domestic and the public.³ These correlations mean that

gender was one of the ordering principles of the universe; thus gender disorder had serious consequences.

WOMEN, RELIGION, AND FAMILY

I will argue in this essay that one of the durable tensions in Chinese society surrounding religion is the potential conflict between the demands of religion and the demands of family. The demands of the domestic are articulated more clearly in the case of women than they are of men, though they are not absent from the lives of men.⁴ All religion has the potential to disrupt the social order: it does not fit into tidy paradigms. Worldly authority could easily be threatened in a realm where texts were transmitted from the spirit world to the mundane world, and where humans communicated with the dead by spirit writing. A young woman who could make a credible claim that she was in communication with the spirit world had the capacity to disrupt, if ever so briefly, conventional notions of gender and generational hierarchy. If we look at the prohibition of women going out (to temples) and the prohibition of specific women (the six hags) coming in to elite households, we may get a partial clue to the dynamics of gender and religion in the Ming. Gender was mapped by the notion of inner and outer: upper class seclusion was widely practiced. Women of the upper classes belonged at home. If women were to leave home, what kind of a threat was it? Women of the upper classes were criticized for religious activity, but they were much less likely than women from lower classes to be punished for heterodox activity, even when their activities seem, on the face of it, to be profoundly heterodox. An elite woman who stayed at home and maintained the boundaries of gender propriety was allowed a degree of latitude in her behavior.

Ming religion (at least until the very late Ming) might have seemed familiar to a person from Song or Yuan times, but gender relations would have seemed quite different. Our understanding of the nature of gender in the Ming has greatly expanded in the past several decades. Yet there are still a number of seeming contradictions. The status of widows underwent a profound change: the cult of widow chastity flourished, and widows lost control of their dowries. And footbinding, rare in the Song, became more widespread in the Ming. (Both of these changes continued in the Qing, but we see evidence of them in the late Ming.) But women also seem to have had more access to education, at least by the late Ming. More women were writing, and more women were getting published. These seemingly contradictory changes suggest of course that change does not happen in a linear fashion.

CHANGING ROLES FOR WOMEN IN THE RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE

While the nature of the evidence is fragmentary at best, it also seems that by the sixteenth century women are playing a more important role in religion. We see abbesses; we see mystics; we see leaders of what some call heterodox cults and others call new religions; we see leaders of religiously inflected rebellions. And we have mounting evidence of ordinary domestic worship, by elite Han women in their inner quarters.⁵

Guanyin, a bodhisattva who is represented as having both male and female forms, is an excellent starting point to a discussion of gender and religion in late imperial China. It is perhaps not surprising to see gender fluidity in Buddhism, which regards the human form as illusory and impermanent. The human form may be illusory, but there nonetheless are problems attendant upon the female form. In “The Sutra on Transforming the Female Form,” the Buddha provides instructions as to how a devout woman can transform herself into a man so that she can be reborn into the Pure Land, a paradise where women are not allowed. The story goes as follows: a girl child with perfect understanding is born, and Buddha’s disciple Sariputra asks her why she chose to come as a woman. She answers, “I have not now taken a male’s shape and not taken a female’s shape. Truly I took up no form, feeling, perception, impulse, or consciousness in coming to be born in this place!”⁶ She then asks the Buddha why she must shed her female form to attain enlightenment. He responds:

The female body resembles that of a maidservant and cannot obtain self-sovereignty for she is constantly troubled by sons, daughters, clothing, food and drink, and other necessities related to family matters. They must remove dung and defilement, nasal discharges, saliva, and other impure things. A female will go through nine months of pregnancy, during which she will suffer numerous pains. When she gives birth to a child, she suffers great pains to the brink of death. For this reason, a woman must give rise to the thought of abhorring and getting rid of her female body.⁷

The dialog is instructive: the girl child with perfect understanding sees gender as illusory, but in this text at least, the Buddha worries about women’s physical and material attachment to the mundane and the impure. There is of course a remedy: the girl child with perfect understanding can become a man, presumably taking her perfect understanding with her. Enlightenment requires “abhorring and getting rid of her female body,” and fluid conceptions of gender make it possible for her to do so. But gender fluidity in no way suggests that gender does not matter; in some senses the fact that one can change gender shows exactly how important it is to have the correct gender.

This heritage of gender fluidity may help us understand the gender transformation at one level: if the body is illusory, why should the body of the bodhisattva have a fixed gendered form? The gender transformations we saw above are from female to male, to grant a female believer access to degrees of enlightenment that are available only to men. In the case of Guanyin, however, we see something rather different, the transformation from a male form to a female form.

Guanyin is a manifestation of the Indian bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, who in the Indian context was normally represented as male. But even in early texts, Avalokiteśvara is represented as having the ability to appear in a form in which he/she would be able to preach most effectively to his audience. The *Lotus Sutra* lists 33 forms in which Avalokiteśvara might appear: seven of them are female; the *Surangama Sutra* lists six female forms of the bodhisattva.⁸ Indeed, Guanyin's gender-bending proclivities are shown in an early (probably seventh century) *dharani*,⁹ which promises to grant one who believes in Guanyin any wish, including the wish to change gender.¹⁰

But in China by the Ming dynasty Guanyin had attained a fairly consistent female form. Chun-fang Yü argues that Guanyin became female at the same time she became Chinese: an Indian bodhisattva became a Chinese goddess. Yu argues that story of Miaoshan is central to the transformation of Guanyin: it represents a domestication of Guanyin, in several senses of that word. The story goes like this: Miaoshan was a princess, a stubborn girl who refused to marry. She fled to a nunnery to prevent her father the king from forcing her to marry. She was sheltered there by nuns; her father was so enraged by the nuns' actions that he burned down the nunnery. This is a Buddhist story, so there is retribution—the vengeful father comes down with a loathsome disease. He is told that the only one who can cure him is a being who would relinquish an eye and an arm with no rancor. He despairs of finding such a being, but someone tells him of a hermit living at a place called Xiangshan who might be able to help. He goes to Xiangshan and finds the hermit, who is indeed willing to offer him an eye and an arm. As he is hacking off the hermit's arm and gouging out her eye, he recognizes the hermit as his daughter and as an incarnation of the thousand-eyed, thousand-armed Guanyin. But the gory story has a happy ending: he is converted to Buddhism.

Yü argues that this story not only makes Guanyin unambiguously female, it makes her unambiguously Chinese. She points out that Chinese deities are concrete—they have birthplaces and birthdays, for example, in a way that Indian bodhisattvas did not. Guanyin's identification with Miaoshan gives her a connection to a real place in

China—Xiangshan—and a birthday, the nineteenth day of the second month, the day of Miaoshan's birth. This degree of temporal and geographical specificity—she came from a place, in a time—facilitated her becoming a Chinese goddess. Yü argues that the story had become well known by the thirteenth century.¹¹ She speculates that the stubborn girl who refused to marry became popular in China as a form of resistance to the patriarchal structures of both institutional Buddhism and neo-Confucianism. There is, as Yü points out, irony in this, as Miaoshan became an iconic figure of filial piety, and perhaps even served as a justification for *gegu*, a practice of radical filial piety which involved the practice of cutting off portions of one's own flesh to make medicine for one's parents.¹²

I would suggest that there is another point to the story, which has to do with the exploration and resolution of the conflict between filial piety and religious duty. The stubborn daughter who will not marry is the agent of the king's conversion. While the story itself demonstrates the potential for terrible conflict between religious calling and family duty, the resolution suggests that there is a way in which religion and family life can be reconciled, if only one can persuade one's father to follow one's religion. It is hard to know who holds the real power in this story: the king who burns down the nunnery or the daughter who converts him to Buddhism. But the real victor in the story is the domestic: the conversion of the father puts the daughter's religious practice back into the realm of the domestic.

Guanyin was the most important deity in Ming China, and she found wide following among both men and women. Her identity as female was more or less fixed, though some temples held images of Guanyin that were either male or androgynous.¹³ She was known as the Bodhisattva of Compassion, a virtue which was particularly attached to mothers in China. It might be too glib to say that Chinese believers found it easier to change the gender of the bodhisattva than to change their expectations of gendered behavior, but there would be some truth to the statement despite its glibness. Women showed their devotion to Guanyin in a number of ways: they chanted and copied sutras, they painted or embroidered images which they venerated, they wore hairpins which mimicked Guanyin's headdress,¹⁴ they went on pilgrimages. Some of these activities were performed by both men and women, but others are gender specific. Men in the Ming rarely did embroidery, nor did they wear Guanyin hairpins. All of these activities except for pilgrimage could be conducted safely and privately within their inner quarters.

But this does not mean that women practicing religion within the inner quarters produced no anxiety. Tanyangzi, the daughter of Wang

Xijue, claimed the status of a widow after the death of her fiancée and continued to live in the Wang family compound. The biography of her by Wang Shizhen and her father articulates the anxiety her family felt when she stopped eating, when she insisted that she would not marry, and when she began having visions. But she convinced both men (and a number of others in their circle) that she was indeed in communion with the Queen Mother of the West, who had transmitted to her the secrets of immortality. Wang Shizhen and Wang Xijue were impeached for heterodoxy but nothing of consequence happened as a result of the impeachment.¹⁵

GETTING OUTSIDE: PILGRIMAGES AND BEYOND

Pilgrimage was another matter. When elite women went on pilgrimage it caused great consternation among men. Even simple visits to temples caused anxiety. Both the Ming and the Qing codes prohibited women from visiting temples. The Ming code reads:

If official, military or civilian families allow their wives or daughters to burn incense in the Buddhist temples or Daoist monasteries, they shall be punished by 40 strokes of beating with a light stick. Only the adult males shall be punished. If there are no adult males, the responsible women shall be punished. If the abbots or gatekeepers do not forbid them, then the punishment shall be the same [for them].¹⁶

But the statutory prohibitions were not enough. In his manual for magistrates, Huang Liuhong reiterated the proscription. During the reign of the Jiajing emperor, Buddhism fell into disfavor, and nunneries were criticized by the official Hua Tuo:

Men and women are different; this is the norm of the ancients. As for nuns, within they lack a husband and family; above, they lack a father and mother; below, they lack descendants. Is this not pathetic? They call [what they are doing] religious cultivation, but in actuality, they are transgressing the norms. And, moreover, they also contaminate the wives and daughters of others. Is this not disgusting?¹⁷

Liu Zongzhou recommended that one of the primary duties of the *baojia* (a system of local control) should be to prevent women from going to temples.¹⁸ The very early Qing magistrate Huang Liuhong prescribed what should be done about women who visit temples: if the woman were wealthy, her servants should be punished; if she were poor, her husband should be punished.¹⁹ Huang claimed that women “actually participated in orgies on the premises of temples,” and that women “seek liaisons with dissipated youths in secret passages of

monasteries.”²⁰

There are several points of note here, in addition to the fact that Huang felt women should not go to temples. First, the women themselves are not to be punished for their activities, implying that they were not responsible for their own behavior. Second, the distinct class differences are of interest: wealthy men are not punished for their wives' activities, but poorer men are. Does this mean that wealthy men are not held responsible for the perceived misdeeds of their wives? That servants are punished for a woman's activities suggests something of the authority servants had in elite households, authority that would not surprise a reader of Ming and Qing fiction.²¹ Perhaps poor men are punished because their wives did not have servants, and clearly someone must be punished for the infraction. But it is a well-known fact that women did go on pilgrimages: the sputtering reiterations of literati that they not go is merely evidence that they did.

Pilgrimages in the Ming might be large affairs, in which social classes and genders would mix. Shen Qingfeng commented about the practice of pilgrimage to Taishan:

Each year in the third and fourth month men and women from all parts climb in hundreds of thousands to offer sacrifice to [Pi-hsia] Yuan-chun. If you look up the mountain by night the lanterns are like ten thousand bushels of glow-worms milling up and down like ants, seething like a cauldron, resounding like thunder.²²

The fact that the pilgrims are described as ants suggests the scorn with which the author regarded them. Late Ming temples had something of a scandalous reputation: one does not have to look far to find licentious stories in the late Ming vernacular repertoire.²³ But in the above passage, it is not the monks and nuns that create the fear: it is the pilgrims themselves. There is perhaps a touch of class anxiety here: not only are men and women mixing, but elegant ladies might mix with ant-like peasants. The pilgrims are not subject to human control; they transgress normal human order. But it is difficult for a secular magistrate to stop them because they are serving a deity, in this case Bixia Yuanjun.

Pilgrimage may have been the chief occasion for elite religious women to leave their homes, but the religious landscape in the Ming also featured roaming religious women. One of the ways we know that there were such women is the repetition of prohibitions of contact with them. But again, the prohibition can be taken as evidence for the persistence of the practice. Roaming for religious purposes was a way of transcending seclusion, not only their own seclusion but that of the women whose homes they frequented. One of the reasons that these women were so

dangerous is that they transgressed boundaries.²⁴

Another way in which women left home was to join monastic institutions, particularly Buddhist nunneries. But women joining monastic institutions (and attaining power therein) also aroused male ire. Qian Qianyi (1582–1644) was offended by women who claimed dharma transmission from eminent masters—he wrote that such women “stick out their heads and expose their faces almost as if they were acting in a play.”²⁵ His comparison of female Buddhist masters to actresses is particularly telling when we remember the low social status of actors in the late Ming. And note that one of the things that exasperates is the visibility of their heads and faces: they are no longer secluded. But Qian Qianyi’s ire tells us that there were in fact such women, and in great enough numbers to attract his disapproval.

One such woman who stuck out her head and exposed her face is Jizong Xingche, who was born in 1606 in a wealthy family in Henan. She became a Chan master and wrote an autobiography, which Beata Grant has studied. One preface to her autobiography contains the following description of her effectiveness as a teacher:

The gentry officials all looked up to her in admiration, the four classes (monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen) all flocked to her in droves, and there was none who did not wish to extend to her an invitation to preach the dharma. Her bows and shouts were delivered with the power and swiftness of lightning, her preaching of the dharma was of benefit to sentient beings, and among those who filled her quarters, there were many who achieved deep insight.²⁶

This preface indicates the general esteem in which she was held. But Grant argues that while Jizong Xingche presents herself in the autobiography more or less as a male Chan master would, the men who wrote the prefaces to her works almost always mentioned her gender.²⁷

While women in orthodox religion posed one kind of problem, women in religions regarded as unorthodox posed another kind of problem. Women were regarded as being particularly susceptible to unorthodox religions. When men assert the virtues of their mothers (or other women), they often state that they did not follow unorthodox practices. Wang Heng, the son of Wang Xijue and the brother of Tanyangzi (of whom we’ll see more later) provides us with a vivid snapshot of vibrant religious life in Suzhou in the late sixteenth century in a eulogy he wrote for his mother:

Here in Wu, it is the custom in spring days and autumn nights for women to go on pilgrimages to mountain temples, to burn incense in front of the Buddha. My mother alone refused to set foot out the door. Nuns and shamans and people who could see

ghosts thronged throughout the village. Only at our door did they hesitate; they did not dare approach.²⁸

We owe this description to Wang Heng's pride in his mother's virtue in avoiding the temptations that they presented. More information about leadership roles assumed by women in local religious groups comes from a local gazetteer from Wuchang dated 1560 which describes sutra-reading societies led by "old village women." The author notes, "Old village women take turns as leaders. Many are enticed by crafty monks, and even their husbands fall for their evil tricks. It is a great burden on good customs, and should be strictly forbidden by the magistrate."²⁹ The women, on the one hand, were deluded by crafty monks, and on the other hand, deluded their own husbands. They are both deluded and deluders.

WOMEN IN THE NEW RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE OF THE LATE MING

One of the remarkable aspects of late Ming religion is the growth of new religions, and the birth of a new deity, the Venerable Eternal Mother (*wusheng lao mu*). This new religion, called by different names, was probably related to the renewed importance of Guanyin and the growing importance of lay Buddhism. The earliest mention of the Venerable Eternal Mother is probably the *Five Books in Six Volumes* by Luo Qing (1443–1557).³⁰ The religion was propagated through texts called *baojuan* (precious scrolls). In this new religion, the Venerable Eternal Mother was a matriarch who sat at the peak of the Chinese pantheon. Over the course of time, the human race had become alienated from the goddess. The Venerable Eternal Mother was presented as a deity who cared for the well-being of her children and hated to see them suffer. She was a "mother who tearfully awaited reunion with her estranged children."³¹ Women played a prominent role in the leadership of the religion; Luo Qing's own daughter, whose religious name was Foguang, was one such leader.³² The abbess of the Baoming temple in Beijing was held to be an incarnation of the Venerable Eternal Mother. A text transmitted to a young nun named Guiyuan, stresses the ways in which the relationship of believers to the deity mimicked a mother-child relationship: "The children will rush into the Mother's embrace. They will sit on her nine lotus seat, being free and joyful, with bright illumination all around them."³³ The size of these religious movements is not inconsequential. For example, perhaps two million people followed Wang Sen, who was arrested for seditious activity in 1595.³⁴

While we know quite a bit about the belief system of these new religions from their own writings, much of what we know about their practice comes from the brush of critics. The criticism shows us ways in which the community of believers marked themselves as different from local society. A local history from Wuxi in 1574 reported that followers refused to sacrifice to their ancestors. The gazetteer goes on to tell us that “Men and women mingle together to burn incense and eat vegetarian meals.”³⁵ Thus we can see in the brief report three ways in which the religion was heterodox: members did not properly venerate ancestors; nor did they maintain gender segregation or eat meat. The last point may seem trivial, but Barend ter Haar has shown that eating meat was central to community rituals—ancestral sacrifices normally involved meat. Refraining from meat (and alcohol) marked a sect member as different from the community.³⁶ Another way to put it is that what marked these believers as unorthodox was a set of deviant domestic practices.

WOMEN AND DAOISM

Another important change in late Ming religion is in the way gender and religion are configured in Daoist meditational practice, which begins in the late Ming but is not fully articulated until the late eighteenth or even nineteenth centuries. Meditation in Daoism is very body centered; in men it was centered in semen and in women in breasts.³⁷ But the texts which describe distinctive women’s practices are not seen until the late eighteenth or nineteenth centuries.³⁸ The Ming adept’s body is androgynous; there is not a separate way for men and women. It is the case that the androgynous body is a default male body, but the lack of a separate path for women is still of note. Meditational texts and medical texts shared in some ways a common conception of the body and Ming medical texts also posited a more or less androgynous body. Gender differences were marked in obstetrical texts, but in texts that dealt with general medicine, the female body was not marked.³⁹ In the very late Ming, Fu Shan (who was a physician) produced Daoist meditational texts that direct women to engage in practices that would cut off menstruation. A woman who menstruated could not attain Daoist immortality after the seventeenth century. We see no hint of separate meditational practices in earlier Ming text.⁴⁰

We see a real-life case of this with Tanyangzi (1567–1580), a Daoist visionary who was the daughter of Wang Xijue, who was to become senior grand secretary. Her visions cause her father considerable consternation, but she ultimately convinces him that her visionary

experience is real. Her father and Wang Shizhen write an important biography of her, which venerates her as a teacher but also in some senses completes the domestication of her.⁴¹ As with Miaoshan, it is hard to say who wins in this struggle of wills: one might say it is the domestic that wins.

Despite her insistence that she herself not marry, Tanyangzi counsels a woman who wants to declare discipleship and follow her that she should wait until her children are grown before leaving family life; the stakes of leaving young children were simply too high, and Tanyangzi was afraid the woman would be resentful.⁴²

One of the truisms of gender distinctions in the Ming dynasty is that all women married and that elite women's activities were restricted to the home. In the realm of religion, we see this challenged somewhat, but only somewhat. Some of the most compelling stories of religious women told in the Ming (not all of which originated in the Ming) are about the complicated ways in which women negotiated their duties to their families and their obligations to their religious. But ordinary women were not so bound by gender seclusion as were elite women. The old women who led sutra-reading groups, the wandering women who saw ghosts, the leaders of heterodox sects, are part of the story of gender and religion in the Ming. We find out about these practitioners largely through elite criticisms of them. It might be an exaggeration to say that one of the things that distressed men most about female religious activity in the Ming was violations of spatial decorum. But the nature of religious authority, particularly in Chinese traditions, allowed even young women, who could make credible claims to contact with the divine, an audience, in both elite and peasant circles.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we can see that religion offered women an arena of activity that might transcend domestic roles. This had very different consequences for ordinary women and members of the elite. Ordinary women might wander; old village women might start reading groups. Elite women were confined to the inner quarters, except for rare occasions like pilgrimage. Religion offered the possibility that women of different social classes might mix, and we see evidence of fear of this mixing in exhortations to keep visitors out of the inner quarters. And we see changes over the course of the Ming in the ways in which gender and religion are configured. The new religions which focused on the Eternal Unborn Mother which emerge in the sixteenth century not only foregrounded a female deity but offered actual women the possibility of

leadership positions. And changes in Daoist meditational techniques which begin to surface in the seventeenth century suggest a new kind of attention to the female body, which raises a whole set of questions as to how the nature of the connection between gender and religion might be configured differently in the Qing dynasty. Finally, we have really only considered Han Chinese women herein, largely because they are most represented in the written sources. The religious experiences of the Ming's many minority women were undoubtedly varied and their roles consonant with variations in local cultural and religious practices.

NOTES

- 1 See Victoria Cass, *Dangerous Women: Warriors, Grannies, and Geishas of the Ming* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999), especially chapter 4.
- 2 For a more extensive introduction to the question of gender and religion in premodern China, see the article by Beata Grant, "Women, Gender, and Religion, in Premodern China: A Brief Introduction," *Nan nü* 10.1 (2008), 2–21. See also the excellent bibliography, also compiled by Grant, "Women, Gender, and Religion in Premodern China: A Selected Bibliography of Secondary Sources in Chinese and Western Languages," *Nan nü*, 10.1 (2008), 152–75. For an excellent general bibliography on religion in China, see Barend ter Haar "Chinese Religious Culture: A Research Guide." <https://bjterhaa.home.xs4all.nl/chinrelbibl.htm>. The reader might also be interested in the essays in Ann Pang-White, *The Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Chinese Philosophy and Gender* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2016). Although the time period is later than the one under consideration here, see Kang Xiaofei, "Women, Gender and Religion in Modern China, 1900s–1950s: An Introduction" *Nan nü* 19.1 (2017), 1–27. For a general bibliography on recent work on women and gender in China, see Robin Yates and Danni Cai, "Bibliography of Studies on China and Gender in China since 2008," *Nan nü* 20.1 (2018) 3–152. While there is very interesting work that could be done on masculinity in Chinese religion, here I am concentrating on women and Chinese religion, at least in part because that is where the bulk of the secondary scholarship lies.
- 3 An excellent discussion of the complicated relationship between *yin* and *yang* and gender is Alison Black, "Gender and Cosmology in Chinese Correlative Thinking," in Caroline Walker Bynum, Stevan Harrell, and Paula Richman, eds., *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1986), 166–9. *Yin* corresponded to dark, the moon, moist; *yang* corresponded to light, the sun, dry. For a discussion of the correspondences of inner and outer, see Dorothy Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth Century China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 11–14.
- 4 For example, when Wang Shizhen went into retreat following the death of his teacher Tanyangzi, he wrote to a number of friends that he had abandoned his children. See Ann Waltner, "Remembering the Lady Wei: Eulogy and Commemoration in Ming Dynasty China" *Ming Studies*, 2007. 1 (2007), 75–103.
- 5 On abbesses, see several articles by Beata Grant, "Writing Oneself into the Tradition: The Autobiographical Sermon of Chan Master Jigong Xingche (b.1606)," in *Gendering Chinese Religion: Subject, Identity and Body*, edited by Jinhua Jia, Xiaofei Kang, and Ping Yao (Albany, NY: State University of New

- York Press, 2014). Also see Beata Grant, “Chan Friends: Poetic Exchanges between Gentry Women and Buddhist Nuns in Seventeenth Century China,” in Grace Fong and Ellen Widmer, eds., *The Inner Quarters and Beyond: Women Writers from Ming through Qing* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2010), *passim*, but esp. 217. On women as leaders in religiously inflected rebellions, see Pi-ching Hsu, “Tang Saier and Yongle: Contested Images of a Rebel Woman and a Monarch in Ming-Qing Narratives,” *Ming Studies* 2007.1 (2007), 6–36.
- 6 Stephanie Balkwill, “The Sutra on Transforming the Female Form: Unpacking an Early Medieval Chinese Buddhist Text,” *Journal of Chinese Religions* 44. 2 (2016), 130.
- 7 Balkwill, “The Sutra on Transforming the Female Form,” 130.
- 8 Chun-fang Yü, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteśvara* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 294.
- 9 Yü glosses *dharani* as “syllables for prayer.”
- 10 Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 51.
- 11 Yü, *Kuan-yin*, 291.
- 12 In addition to Yü on Miaoshan, see Glen Dudbridge, *The Legend of Miao-shan* (London: Ithaca Press, 1978).
- 13 Yü, 6. And there are of course painters, such as Ding Yunpeng (c. 1547–1628), who painted both male and female images of Guanyin.
- 14 For chanting and copying sutras, see Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*. For making images, see Ko, *Teachers of the Inner Chambers*, and Li Yuhang “Embroidering Guanyin: Constructions of the Divine through Hair,” *East Asian Science, Technology and Medicine* 36 (2012), 131–66. For pilgrimages see Susan Naquin and Chun-fang Yü, *Pilgrimage and Sacred Sites in China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), and Glen Dudbridge, “A Pilgrimage in Seventeenth-Century Fiction: T’ai-Shan and the *Hsing-Shih Heng-Yen*,” *T’oung Pao* 77.4–5 (1991), 226–52. For private worship, see Grant, “Chan Friends,” 216–17, and *passim*. For embroidery, see Li Yuhang, “Embroidering Guanyin.”
- 15 Ann Waltner, “Tanyangzi in her own Words and those of Wang Shizhen,” in Joan Judge and Hu Ying, eds., *Beyond Exemplar Tales: Women’s Biography in Chinese History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011), 212–29.
- 16 Translated by Jiang Yonglin, *The Great Ming Code: Da Ming lü* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2005). For the Qing, see Vincent Gossaert, “Irrepressible Female Piety: Late Imperial Bans on Women Visiting Temples,” *Nan nü* 2 (2008), 213.
- 17 Cited in Beata Grant, *Daughters of Emptiness: Poems of Chinese Buddhist Nuns* (Sommerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2003), 11–12.
- 18 Liu Zongzhou (1578–1645), “Baomin xuniao (Shuofu xu),” in *Shuofu sanzong*, 10 vols. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1988), vol. 9, 435:11a. 60, quoted by Gossaert, “Irrepressible Female Piety,” 229.
- 19 *Fuhui quanshu*, 31.10b–11b, cited in Gossaert, “Irrepressible Female Piety,” 232. For a discussion of the logic of a woman being punished only if there is not a man to be punished, see Jiang Yonglin, “Legislating Hierarchical yet Harmonious Gender Relations in the Great Ming Code,” *Ming Studies* 69 (2014), 27–45.
- 20 Brian Dott, *Identity Reflections: Pilgrimages to Mount Tai in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004), 107.
- 21 See, for example, the authority of the servant Aroma in the eighteenth-century novel by Cao Xueqin, *Dream of the Red Chamber*, translated by David Hawkes

- and John Minford as *The Story of the Stone* 5 vols. (New York: Penguin, 1974–1986).
- 22 Cited in Glen Dudbridge, “A Pilgrimage in Seventeenth- Century Fiction,” 226, citing a mid-seventeenth century observer.
- 23 There would be many examples. For example, Vincent Goessaert cites a story in Feng Menglong’s *Xingshi Hengyan* where women who went to temples to pray for children were impregnated by monks. See Goessaert, “Irrepressible Female Piety,” 227.
- 24 Yi Ruolan, *San gu liu po: Ming daifu nü yu shehui de tansuo* (Taipei: Sanlien, 2002).
- 25 Grant, “Writing Oneself,” 49.
- 26 Grant, “Writing Oneself,” 51.
- 27 Grant, “Writing Oneself,” 64–6.
- 28 Wang Heng, *Wang Goushan xiansheng ji*, 14/36b (1074).
- 29 *Wucheng xianzhi*, cited and discussed in Barend ter Haar, *The White Lotus Teachings in Chinese Religious History* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997), 197.
- 30 Richard Shek and Tetsuro Noguchi, “Eternal Mother Religion: Its History and Ethics,” in Kwang-chiu Liu and Richard Sek, eds., *Heterodoxy in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009), 242. See also Shek, “The Alternative Moral Universe of Religious Dissenters in Ming-Qing China,” in James D. Tracy and Marguerite Ragnow, eds., *Religion and the Early Modern State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 13–51.
- 31 Shek and Noguchi, “Eternal Mother Religion,” 247–8.
- 32 Shek and Noguchi, “Eternal Mother Religion,” 248.
- 33 Shek and Noguchi, “Eternal Mother Religion,” 253. On the Baoming temple, see also Thomas Shi-yu Li and Susan Naquin, “The Baoming Temple: Religion and the Throne in Ming and Qing China,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 48. 1 (1988), 131–88.
- 34 Shek and Noguchi, “Eternal Mother Religion,” 254.
- 35 Shek and Noguchi, “Eternal Mother Religion,” 259.
- 36 Barend ter Haar, *Practicing Scripture: A Lay Buddhist Movement in Late Imperial China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2014), 90.
- 37 Catherine Despeux and Livia Kohn, *Women in Daoism* (Cambridge, MA: Three Pines Press, 2003), 189 ff.
- 38 Despeux and Kohn, *Women in Daoism*, 202; also Elena Valussi, “Female Alchemy: An Introduction,” in Livia Kohn and Robin Wang, eds., *Inner Alchemy: Self, Society and the Quest for Immortality* (Magdalena, NM: Three Pines Press, 2009). Elena Valussi, “Female Alchemy: The Transformation of a Gendered Body,” in Jinhua Jia, Xiaofei Kang, and Ping Yao, eds., *Gendering Chinese Religion: Subject, Identity and Body* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2014). Louis Komjathy identifies Sun Buer as the “source-point” in the later development of female alchemy, but agrees with Valussi that female alchemy itself is a late-imperial development. Louis Komjathy, “Sun Buer: Early Quanzhen Matriarch and the Beginnings of Female Alchemy,” *Nan nü* 16 (2014), 171–238.
- 39 Charlotte Furth, *A Flourishing Yin: Gender in China’s Medical History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998).
- 40 It is worth noting that He Longxiang, who compiled an important collection of female alchemy texts in the early twentieth century did not look upon previous

practices as androgynous: he regarded them as providing no guidance for women. See Elena Valussi, “Men and Women in He Longxiang’s *Nüdan hebian*,” *Nan nü* 10 (2008), 242–78. He noted that the paucity of women who practiced alchemy was not due to any inherent defects, but was rather due to social constraints. Valussi, “Men and Women in He Longxiang’s *Nüdan hebian*,” 247.

41 Waltner, “Tanyangzi in her own Words.”

42 Waltner, “Tanyangzi in her own Words.”

CHAPTER 8

ADOPTING *THE ORPHAN*

Theater and urban culture in Ming China



Yuming He

INTRODUCTION: THEATER AND MING CULTURE

Ming subjects felt the impact of theater in increasingly multifaceted ways. With the unprecedented development and expanded reach of the woodblock imprint market, plays came to be circulated not only through stage performance, but in a bewildering variety of guises, from full play scripts to excerpted arias, as source material for riddles and drinking games and other forms of stylish or witty banter, or through the illustrations of emblematic scenes that provided the era with a distinctive visual vernacular.¹ Hand in hand with these transformations of the media landscape there emerged a corresponding new reading culture that repurposed and reconfigured earlier traditions. Furthermore, the increasing sophistication of the discourses of theatrical

connoisseurship, expressed in voluminous treatises and manuals on dramatic music and performance, helped to create a field of cultural production and consumption that swept up readers and theater-goers from widely disparate social strata.

This essay will seek to trace some of these transformations through the “case” of a single play, or rather a single theatrical plot: the renowned story of revenge and mistaken identity now best known through its classic dramatic rendering in the Yuan *zaju* play *The Orphan of Zhao* (*Zhaoshi gu'er*). As in earlier eras, the relationship to antiquity, and the ongoing reimagining of antiquity, were central to Ming cultural identity. Various forms of *fugu*, or “returning to antiquity,” were at the core of some of the most characteristic trends in Ming literati discourse, founded on a basic assumption that models of expression (especially poetry and prose) from antiquity must provide inspiration and models for Ming writing and for the place of writing in both the building of the empire and the understanding of the self.² In the meantime, the rise of vernacular literature on the book market reprinted and reworked old stories or plays for broader consumption.³ Looking at how the past (in our case, an age-old story) was “adopted” in the Ming gives us a sense of how Ming people, as cultural producers and consumers, became proprietors of a distinctive culture that they called their own.

As many of the essays in this volume highlight, the Ming was a time of radical transformation. Poised at the cutting edge of many key developments in the initial emergence of a truly global economy, Ming society was transfigured through explosive population increases, rapid urbanization, and expanded commercial networks that created new modes of consumption and projected them to an empire-wide (and often worldwide) ambit. A new complex of managerial skills, not simply focused on economic management, but on the management as well of social and cultural capital and social personae, became the object of fascination and emulation. This new social and economic landscape presented tantalizing objects of acquisitive or emulative desire, while at the same time rendering the stability of traditional beliefs and traditional bases of social status increasingly precarious.

As we prepare to address the question of how the “Orphan” tradition was experienced and understood by Ming audiences as printed text and stage performance (and through a range of ancillary genres and modes of reference and recirculation), and how that tradition was itself reshaped in this process, we should attend as well to a set of related questions: How did the theater itself shape Ming culture? How did a play become socially significant in the Ming? How was the meaning of this story, derived from traditions in the constellation of the *Spring and*

Autumn classic, inflected by the specific characteristics of the Ming media landscape—with the profusion in volume and genre of print publications, the rise of the novel, the vogue for the theater, and the rise of an intertwined world of painting and woodblock illustrations that taken together helped express and shape everyday experience? In this connection we might recall the concept of “social energy” invoked by Stephen Greenblatt and other practitioners of “New Historicism” to reflect on the process of cultural actions and transactions that allow us to sense a text’s place and significance for a given society.⁴ The case of the Orphan Zhao story serves as an illuminating example for us to see how Ming people “adopted” a story from the past, as well as the types of “social energy” that came to bear in the process, and the kinds of meanings that the resulting reshaped tradition carried for Ming people as they negotiated the aspirations and anxieties of their own world.

LINEAGES OF THE “ORPHAN” IN THE MING

The Orphan story is loosely based on narratives surrounding Zhao Dun (?–601 BCE), a minister of the state of Jin, first appearing in scattered references in the *Zuo zhuan*, an early annalistic history transmitted as an adjunct to the canonical *Spring and Autumn Annals*, and subsequently given more continuous treatment in Sima Qian’s (145–86 BCE) *Shiji*. Ming texts reflect two traditions in the theatrical transmission of the Orphan Zhao story: that of *zaju* (lit., “variety show”) and that of the *nanxi* (southern drama).⁵ The *zaju* Orphan, attributed to the thirteenth-century playwright Ji Junxiang, was first printed in the Yuan and later revised and reprinted in the Ming by, among others, the renowned dramatist and theater connoisseur Zang Maoxun (1550–1620). This *zaju* Orphan was to become, in the eighteenth century, the first Chinese play translated into any European language, and it thus has long occupied a landmark position in the global history of theater.⁶ As for the *nanxi* tradition, although there is evidence that one or more versions of a *nanxi* Orphan play of unknown authorship were in circulation during the Yuan, the earliest extant editions of such a play all date from the Ming. It has been argued that these extant Ming editions of the *nanxi* Orphan show traces of direct derivation from the *zaju* version, but this point cannot be taken as settled.⁷ For convenience, I will here refer to these Ming editions of the *nanxi* Orphan play collectively as the “Southern Orphan,” drawing distinctions among editions only where relevant.⁸ While it remains unclear whether or how the *zaju* version of the Orphan play was still staged during the Ming, it is beyond doubt, as we shall see, that the “Southern Orphan” was continuously staged throughout the dynasty, in popular theaters as well as at private elite

gatherings.⁹ While the now canonical Yuan *zaju* version was known to Ming theater connoisseurs, it was the “Southern Orphan” that was to become the definitive version for the broader Ming reading and viewing public.

RECASTING THE ORPHAN: ZAJU VS. NANXI

The basic plot of the “Orphan” narrative is well known to drama readers in China and worldwide through the renown of the Yuan *zaju*. The action is set in the Spring and Autumn-era state of Jin, at the court of the state’s ruler, the libertine Marquis Ling. Zhao Dun, a righteous minister at the Marquis’s court, along with his entire family of three hundred, including his son Zhao Shuo, and Zhao Shuo’s wife, a daughter of the Marquis, are exterminated through the machinations of Zhao Dun’s rival, the unscrupulous minister Tu’an Gu.¹⁰ Before Zhao Shuo’s wife (the princess) dies, she gives birth to a son, who upon the death of his parents becomes the eponymous “Orphan” of the play’s title. A succession of people die through a complex web of sacrifice, subterfuge, and betrayal in order to ensure the Orphan’s survival. The retainer Cheng Ying exchanges his own son with the Orphan to give to Gongsun Chujiu, who plans to take the Orphan to safety; Cheng Ying then reports Gongsun Chujiu to Tu’an Gu. After Tu’an Gu kills both Cheng Ying’s son (the fake Orphan) and Gongsun Chujiu, he adopts Cheng Ying’s ostensive son (the real Orphan) as his own. When the Orphan grows up, Cheng Ying unfurls and explains a narrative scroll painting of the Orphan Zhao story for him; as this retelling reaches its climax, the Orphan is gradually led to a realization of his own true identity—he is neither Cheng Ying’s biological son, nor Tu’an Gu’s adopted son, but in fact the protagonist of the very Orphan narrative Cheng Ying has been recounting. Having thus realized his true parentage and his true role in the story, the Orphan duly takes revenge by killing Tu’an Gu.

Before we turn to consider how the “Southern Orphan” handles this basic narrative, it will be useful to note some of the main formal differences between *zaju* and *nanxi* as theatrical traditions. “Southern drama” is distinguished from the *zaju* form most notably by its far more elaborate plots and by a greater diversity and flexibility in the singing roles it includes. Where a *zaju* generally comprises four acts and one demi-act, a *nanxi* drama can have anywhere from ten to 120 scenes. *Zaju* moreover limits the singing within any one act to a single character, whereas in *nanxi* any character may sing in any scene. In *zaju*, the focus of each act is the response of the single singing character to the dramatic

situation, and the general emotional tenor of the sung portions within an act tends to be fairly unified. In *nanxi*, while there are certainly arioso scenes presenting the heightened lyrical response of a single character to a dramatic situation, *nanxi* playwrights are also drawn to explore the potential of the more fluid handling of singing roles, and the more multilayered plot lines made possible both by the complex cast of characters and by the large number of scenes within a play. This means that in *nanxi* we typically see a wider variety of sites, linguistic registers, and spectacles, and a more differentiated range of characters, closer or more oblique relation to the main plot, and reflecting a wide range of social status and occupation.¹¹



Figure 8.1 Interrogating Gongsun Chujiu. From Zang Maoxun's *Yuanqu xuan*. The phrase “fang Li Di bi” (“imitating the style of Li Di”) is seen on the left side of the illustration



Figure 8.2 The hunting scene. From Zang Maoxun's *Yuanqu xuan*

In many regards the differences in the *zaju* and *nanxi* renderings of the “Orphan” story fall in line with these general tendencies of the two operatic genres: whereas the *zaju* version proceeds through a series of

starkly focused moments of lyrical intensity, the “Southern Orphan” renders the narrative as a complex and interlocking web of heroic acts by secondary characters. This shift away from austere adherence to the central revenge story and toward a panorama of densely intertwined and contrapuntally deployed subplots can help explain one of the best-known titles by which the “Southern Orphan” came to be known during the Ming: the *Ba yi ji*, or *Tale of Eight Heroes*.¹² The “Southern Orphan” expands the cast of secondary heroes with new figures who do not appear in the *zaju* play, and in general emphasizes the polyphonic texture of intertwined plot strands involving characters from a wide range of social stations. The audience is thus presented with an entirely new world far removed from stark focus on court and family drama of the *zaju* version: a complex urban space of commercial exchange, social envy, and intrigue, where roles interchange and overlap.

Like many plays that were reprinted throughout the Ming, the “Southern Orphan” itself evolved over the course of the dynasty through developing new media techniques (e.g., in woodblock printing) and reading practices (e.g., the increasingly close connectedness of picture and text) and through reaching ever-wider audiences of readers and theatergoers whose changing world of reading and experience generated new meanings and highlighted new aspects of the play, but these basic characteristics of the world of the “Southern Orphan” remain stable across all our extant Ming editions of the work.¹³ The “Southern Orphan” throws any concern for historical verisimilitude to the winds, and adapts the Orphan Zhao story to an urban spectacle that could only have been comprehensible since the Song dynasty, when the boundary of the residential ward and the market, the street and marketplace, was broken down in the Song capital Kaifeng.¹⁴ In this respect, just as the Orphan finds himself within the narrative of the scroll painting, in its various editions the “Southern Orphan” became a site for Ming consumers and connoisseurs of urban culture to recognize their own social habitat and to reflect on their own identity.



Figure 8.3 The death of Gongsun Chujiu. From the Shide tang edition of *Zhaoshi gu'er ji*

The different modes of representation in the *zaju* Orphan and the “Southern Orphan” are also reflected in the woodblock illustrations accompanying editions of the plays’ scripts. Figures 8.1 and 8.2 are the two illustrations accompanying the *zaju* play in the *Yuan qu xuan*, or *Selections from Yuan Music-drama*, an influential anthology of Yuan drama produced (and drastically revised) by the Ming dramatist Zang Maoxun. The first shows the moment when Gongsun Chujiu is tortured to force him to surrender the Orphan (as noted above, this is in fact the fake Orphan, Cheng Ying’s son) to Tu’an Gu to be killed. The second shows the hunting expedition of the Orphan (who has at this point been adopted by Tu’an Gu under the misconception that he is Cheng Ying’s son).¹⁵ Figures 8.3 and 8.4 are the two illustrations of the same two moments in the story from a Ming edition of the “Southern Orphan.”¹⁶

The illustrations to the *zaju* version present the scenes as imperial rituals: the formal arrangement echoes visual representations of court spectacles, and the court desk separates the criminal and the judge, whose seat is notably elevated, while Gongsun Chujiu sprawls low on the floor. The *yamen* runners are properly uniformed as such, and lined up in a formal and intimidating show of force. The executioner, in the same uniform as the *yamen* runners, participates in the same court apparatus of power (Figure 8.1). In the hunting scene, the ritualistic aspects of the scene are likewise highlighted: the banner, the ushers and followers, the ritual objects of Golden Melon and Silver Axe, the gate and eaves of a solemn compound, all evoke the ceremonial pomp of a courtly procession (Figure 8.2).



Figure 8.4 The hunting scene. From the Shide tang edition of *Zhaoshi gu'er ji*

The illustrations accompanying the “Southern Orphan,” by contrast, present these “same” scenes not as courtly or imperial ritual but in a markedly colloquial or even casual register. In the scene of Gongsun Chujia’s torture, no *yamen* runners are present; no court desk separates the powerful from the lowly criminals, and the executioner wears the same style of everyday clothes as his victim. The (false) orphan, absent in the *zaju* illustration (Figure 8.1), is shown here having already been informally killed, the crudely rendered blood drops conveying that fact with no concern for dramatic seriousness (Figure 8.3). Similarly, the hunting scene is rendered as an actual hunt instead of a ritual procession; dog and hawk enliven the scene while the orphan, Tu’an Gu, and Cheng Ying are simply doing the business of an outing, not parading their prowess (Figure 8.4).

The modes of representation are also different: the *zaju* illustrations distance the scenes from the reader, as conveyed for example by the self-referencing mark appearing on Figure 8.1: “Imitating the style of Li Di” (Li Di being a famous southern Song painter), reminding readers that they are looking at a representation, an imitation, artful and unreal, and one moreover that has already passed into the realm of the “classical.” The “Southern Orphan” illustrations, by contrast, are merely rough-and-ready devices to render action, drawing readers into the horror or spectacle of the moment, rather than inviting detached aesthetic contemplation.

This style of representation, colloquial and intimate, is a dominant feature of the “Southern Orphan” itself, as it binds characters from different social stations into the same social web of the cityscape. In the process, the audience is presented with an entirely new world distinctive from the *zaju* play: the urban streets. In the “Southern Orphan” this space itself becomes as much of a driver of the narrative as any particular character. As we now turn to a closer examination of some specific moments in the “Southern Orphan,” we will focus on three key sites or moments in its mapping of urban geography: the street and marketplace, the lantern festival, and the Crimson Cirrus Tower (*Jiangxiao lou*).

RE-SITING THE ORPHAN STORY: THE URBAN MILIEU

The “Southern Orphan” concludes with a verse chanted in unison by all the actors who remain on stage at the play’s end:

Retribution for injustice came beneath the Jin Marquis's hall;

right and wrong were distinguished at the crossroads.

As when showing off your fighting skills among skilled fighters—

when you take a punch, remember the punch you gave.¹⁷

The reference to the crossroads as the site for settling accounts of injustice and retribution, as well as the précis of the Orphan Zhao tale with respect to the world of the urban brawler, frame the story in terms of one of the most important sorts of social space within this version of the play: city streets. This “crossroads” may also be read as referring to the typical venue of dramatic performance itself, where the play’s “injustice and retribution” are acted out before a crowd gathered at the busiest and most trafficked part of the city. The closing verse thus weaves the play’s complex narrative into the kaleidoscopic wider world of public spectacle and gossip, the noise and quarrels of street opinion, through which the play itself as a new spectacle will in its turn be rehashed and reinterpreted. At the same time, this verse also gives a summation of the central thematic thread of urban spectacle that permeates the play itself, from the scenes at the play’s very beginning centering on the lantern festival.

The lantern festival, a highlight of urban life since the era of the great medieval capitals, remained a favorite holiday for Ming people. Taking place in the middle of the first month of the lunar calendar, it was a moment when customary prohibitions on nighttime activity were relaxed, and urban dwellers of every station reveled in an unaccustomed freedom to wander about the city at night, enjoying various entertainments, centered on magnificent displays of lanterns of a whimsical range of sizes and designs. Our first glimpse of the brewing conflict between Tu’an Gu and Zhao Dun in the “Southern Orphan” comes in the form of a court debate over the wisdom of allowing this festival to take place. In scene 2, “Lantern festival,” Cheng Ying recites to Zhao Shuo, from memory, the exact language of a memorial that Zhao Dun has submitted to the Marquis of Jin:

I humbly observe, how

Each year in the first month, on the nights of the thirteenth to seventeenth,
these lantern-viewing amusements stir up the city streets.

Bands of musicians play in profusion,
the glow of lanterns shimmers and blazes.

Gathering in cliques, bringing along friends,
in wild games they contest in luck or skill.
Men and women mingle indiscriminately,
lay and clergy mixed together.
Lavish expenditures that destroy livelihoods,
to such an extent that families are scattered and set adrift.
And there's no predicting the mishaps of fire and wind
that might steal their way into the official districts.
From Yan or Zhao may come border emergencies;
while from Qin or Chu we have surprise attacks to fear.
Disorderliness and pollution arise from this,
and from such things social customs turn bad.
Though one call this a celebration, a grace bestowed,
what of the calamities, the afflictions it brings?
Worry to the state, disturbance to the common folk;
while it brings no profit, its harm is real.
I beg that a proclamation be posted in public,
that a prohibition be put in effect.¹⁸

Zhao Dun's fears about the lantern festival echo many of the traditional worries prompted by urban commercial culture from the Song dynasty onwards: the unsettling of status norms and sexual mores attendant on indiscriminate mixing of social classes and genders, and the economic and social volatility driven by emulative desire in an uncontrolled marketplace. The petition uses the concrete worry about fires and theft that might spread through the capital city during the lantern festival to effect a shift in attention from such risks of social mixing and unrestrained desire to dangers that might impact the very security of the state itself.

Tu'an Gu's rebuttal, also related to Zhao Shuo by Cheng Ying in scene 2, dismisses these concerns:

The festival of the Upper Prime [i.e. the lantern festival] is the moment when the celestial officials above bestow blessings, and the day on which the common folk celebrate and share good wishes for a bountiful year. That each family lights and arranges lanterns is nothing more than an expression of wishes for security of the

state and peace to its people. That each household is noisy and boisterous is entirely a means of praying for a rich and ripe harvest of grain. When the common folk are happy in their occupations, the state will surely be secure and at peace. As for those “mishaps of fire and wind,” there are officers charged with vigilant care toward each sort: if thieves and bandits hatch plots, the city’s police forces are ready at any time to patrol and make arrests. As for troublemaking by Yan or Zhao, with your humble servant on duty, what need is there for concern? And as for Qin and Chu, lacking timely intelligence, in a mere three days and nights, just what sort of operation could they put into effect? If there are any oversights or worries, I dare offer myself as guarantee.¹⁹

The urban panorama of the lantern festival offers a dazzling spectacle of light and fantasy, but at the same time, as Zhao Dun points out, it presents danger, both of fires that might burn out of control, and of unknown plots that might take shape in the dark. In the “Southern Orphan,” it is Tu’an Gu’s boastful pride, his arrogant confidence that his personal power can control the volatility of the urban space put on display in the lantern festival, as much as any specific act of injustice towards the Zhao clan, that determines his eventual downfall. As we will see, in the “Southern Orphan” it is the street itself that wins.

CHARACTERS OF THE CITY STREET

The increased prominence of the street in the “Southern Orphan” is vividly embodied in the character Zhou Jian, one of the figures in the “Southern Orphan” who appear neither in traditional sources nor in the *zaju* version of the story. Zhou Jian is himself an orphan who has wandered to the capital, and has lived there for three years. Penniless, but filled with lofty sentiments, and aroused with emulative desire by the spectacle of the lantern festival, he goes to a wine shop run by Old Woman Wang (a *chou* or clown role) and asks for five hundred cash worth of wine and food to enjoy himself. He even attempts to engage a prostitute to keep him company. Such socially aspirational desires, however, are far beyond his means: he dashes off without settling the bill, and is chased into the street by Old Woman Wang. When she catches him, he continues his attempt to play the literary gentleman, offering fine phrases in exchange for his monetary debt:

If you have a son he will be a chamberlain or minister;

if you have a daughter she will be as lovely as a Guanyin.

In business dealings, your money will rise like flooding water;

with a fine family fortune, your sons and grandsons will prosper.²⁰



Figure 8.5 Zhou Chen, “Liumeng tu” (Beggars and Street Characters). Detail, 1516. ink and light color on paper. © The Cleveland Museum of Art



Figure 8.6 Zhao Shuo and the Princess enjoying the lantern festival.
From the Shide tang edition of *Zhaoshi gu'er ji*

Zhou Jian suffers from a familiar sort of role conflict: he harbors a grandiose self-image as a cultured gentleman, but in economic terms he is merely another member of the rootless urban underclass (cf. [Figure 8.5](#), a Ming painting). Old Woman Wang, a small business owner, is firmly focused on economic realities, and drags him off to Zhao Shuo, who is out roaming the city and enjoying the lantern festival with his wife ([Figure 8.6](#)). Old Woman Wang takes him to Zhao Shuo rather than to the civil authorities because it is Zhao's family who has supplied the capital for her own business, and from whom she rents her premises.²¹ This detail alludes to ways in which the Zhao clan's power is grounded not only in Zhao Dun's official position at court, but in a network of commercial interests extending throughout the city.

Zhao Shuo pays Zhou Jian's wine bill, and keeps him on as a family retainer—not from insight into his true character, nor from sympathy with his thwarted ambitions, but merely because Zhou Jian happens to look exactly like Zhao Shuo. Thus is Zhou Jian transformed from a rootless vagabond with vain dreams of playing the gentleman into a figure with a semblance of a social position. This new social position, however, is not his own, but merely the ambiguous position of body-double to the proper gentleman he happens to resemble.

When Zhou Jian exits the stage in scene 5, his last words are:

Not speaking when intoxicated with wine—this is a true gentleman;

Unambiguous and clear about accounting—this is a grand man.²²

At this point in the play it is difficult to see how Zhou Jian's behavior has justified any idea that he has qualified as either a "true gentleman" or a "grand man" by his own standards. The answer to this confusion does not emerge until scene 21, "Zhou Jian Dies as a Proxy," when Zhou Jian offers himself as a substitute to die in Zhao Shuo's place, allowing the latter to escape the massacre of the Zhao family. This settling of accounts reflects a recurrent pattern throughout the "Southern Orphan," whereby the logic of competition, emulative desire, and commercial exchange involves characters in chains of obligation that are impossible to predict in advance, and which entangle them in dangerously unstable forms of exchange beyond their control. Zhou Jian, in debt for five hundred cash as a result of his desire to play the gentleman, is relieved of this debt on the basis of his physical resemblance to Zhao Shuo, but the specific kind of "clear accounting" that proves required of him in the end dictates that he discharge this obligation with that physical simulacrum itself—that is, with his own body.

The *zaju* Orphan involves potent dramatic ironies built on mistakes and misconstruals of Orphan Zhao's identity—not least by the orphan himself. The addition of the Zhou Jian plotline in the “Southern Orphan” provides a good indication of the ways in which these ironies about identity are taken to new levels of complexity in the *nanxi* version of the play, where the problem of the orphan's identity is diffracted across a complex urban social spectrum in which identity is always and everywhere intrinsically volatile. At the close of the “Southern Orphan,” the character who by birth is the true “Orphan Zhao” is not only told of his real identity, but also reunited with both parents in the play's final scene—and thus proven never to have been a real orphan at all. Meanwhile, a real orphan, Zhou Jian, has sacrificed himself at the midpoint of the play precisely in order that “Orphan Zhao” might not become a real orphan.

The “Southern Orphan” creates a sense of the alluring and treacherous social space of the urban streets through a variety of other minor characters of various sorts of low social standing, whose stories intertwine with and respond contrapuntally to the main plotline. Along with the high and low register plotlines linked with the lantern festival outlined above, the street is also the site where gossip is exchanged and public opinion aired, as we see in scene 16, where street gossip passes on the tale of Chu Ni's death. A search for the orphan in scene 33 is implemented through the same system of neighborhood watch units that formed the basic level of police control in late imperial cities. Scene 41, in which the orphan reads the paintings of his family story, recalls key episodes in the whole story, including key moments that are set on the street.

Perhaps the most striking example of these contrapuntal “low” urban narrative threads in the “Southern Orphan” occurs in scene 12, “Making Mock Bear-paw,” in which the Marquis has demanded to be fed bear-paw, a traditional delicacy and a mode of culinary conspicuous consumption. The Marquis's kitchen stores lacking bear paws to satisfy this demand, Tu'an Gu has ordered one of the cooks to wait by the road for travelling laborers, whose hands he is to chop off and bring back as a substitute. A character in the clown role-type, a load-carrier given the transparently ironic name “Overnight Worry,” appears on the scene and explains in a short speech that he has been drawn to the city by his desire to enjoy the spectacle of the Marquis's lavish new palace, the Crimson Cirrus Tower. Gazing raptly up at the distant figures atop the tower, Overnight Worry asks a bystander (who, unknown to him, is the Marquis's cook) who “the one wearing red” is, who “the ones wearing purple” are, and so on.²³ During the ensuing dialogue the cook, under pretense of reading Overnight Worry's palm (he reports that Overnight's

fortune looks “a little bit bad”), cuts off one of his hands. Though this stage business is gruesome, the dialogue remains at a low clowning level, and Overnight’s lament over the loss of his hand focuses on the familiar urban concerns of gambling and account-keeping: he complains how losing a hand will impact his ability to throw dice or count on his fingers.

The scene closes with a peddler walking along the street, proudly cataloguing the array of exotic luxury goods he has brought to sell in the city to “those coddled young lads for their idle amusement.” Just as these words leave his mouth, he falls to the ground, having been shot in the eye by a slingshot pellet. In this narrative detail the “Southern Orphan” revives an early tradition about the Marquis Ling of Jin (absent from the *zaju* “Orphan”) relating that the evil Marquis liked to amuse himself by shooting at passers-by with a slingshot from atop his terrace, for the pleasure of watching them dodge the pellets.²⁴ Drawn to the splendor of the city, both the load-carrier and the peddler are blinded by their desires—whether for material gain or simply for pleasurable spectacle—to the ways in which their own presence in the urban scene has made them fodder for the feeding and entertainment of the city’s powerful. Crimson Cirrus Tower, epicenter of both urban spectacle and of luxury consumption in the “Southern Orphan’s” cityscape, exacts a brutal price from them both.

Along with the wide variety of ranks and occupations represented in the “Southern Orphan’s” expanded roster of characters we encounter an accompanying variety of sociolinguistic types. Extensive and meticulous juxtaposition and ironic play among high and low registers is characteristic of *nanxi* compositional practice. Thus in the exchange between Overnight Worry and the Marquis’s cook discussed above, when the cook asks Overnight Worry, “Do you know who I am?” Overnight Worry first replies “You’re my son!” In colloquial speech this sort of generational one-upmanship is part of a language of banter and insult that is quite conventional. But in a play replete with mistakes about parentage, of sons not knowing their fathers, and of would-be fathers who fall victim to those they took for sons, the vulgar insult takes on ironic overtones that Overnight himself is unaware of.

In this connection we might also note the lantern festival performance presented by a professional singer for the amusement of Zhao Shuo and the princess in scene 5 of the “Southern Orphan.” After boasting of his wide musical repertoire, and performing a drum solo, the singer announces that he is also well-versed in a tradition called the “25 Paragons of Filial Piety.” Since the “24 Paragons of Filial Piety”—a catalog of anecdotal accounts of children who performed heroic feats of

devotion to their parents—is a standard reference in the textual and iconographic traditions surrounding this foundational virtue, the mention of a tradition of “25 Paragons” naturally tends to elicit the question what extra paragon it is that the singer knows of. In this scene, Cheng Ying duly obliges by asking the singer just this question. As it happens, though, this repertoire item is neither a musical performance nor a display of obscure knowledge, but rather an elaborate joke: the singer responds with a seemingly nonsense chain of catalogued familial relations, all ending with the phrase “just one son is filial,” that becomes a sort of tongue-twister, repeated again and again at high speed, until at last he runs out of breath and sinks to the ground in a swoon.²⁵ As Cheng Ying helps him to his feet again, the singer says, “this one helping me to my feet is my filial son.” Thus Cheng Ying, who begins in this clowning interlude in the position of curious audience member, in the end is identified as the “25th paragon,” albeit as the butt of another low-register joke about father-son relations. Such slapstick stage business forms an irreverent counterpoint to the larger concerns of the main plot, not only in terms of problems of parentage and true or suppositious offspring, but also as a lowbrow counterpart to the climactic moment toward the dénouement of the main plot, when the orphan himself, as he listens to Cheng Ying’s own narration of the scroll painting of the orphan story, will progress step by step to the realization that he himself has been the story’s protagonist all along. More generally, the sort of joking and banter displayed here is typical of a popular mode of wit of the Ming, operating through the inventive and often irreverent repurposing of canonical texts and precedents for comic effect.

A NEW (ANTI-)HERO: TU’AN GU

As the revenge narrative of the orphan story is transposed in the “Southern Orphan” onto a multivocal social panorama, the sense of Tu’an Gu as villain is similarly transformed. As noted above, by the intervention of Zhou Jian, Zhao Shuo’s body-double, the “Southern Orphan’s” Tu’an Gu is no longer in fact guilty of killing the “Orphan’s” father (albeit not through any restraint on his part); the “Orphan’s” mother, daughter of the Marquis, who commits suicide in the *zaju* version, also survives in forced isolation through the middle of the “Southern Orphan,” to join in the grand family reunion of the final scene. Zhao Shuo and the princess are portrayed in the “Southern Orphan” by the male-lead (*sheng*) and female-lead (*dan*) role-types, and by their appearances in the opening and closing sections of the play they contribute to the overall structural coherence of a complicated plot. At

the same time, however, they are absent for most of the middle sections of the play, and in fact receive much less vivid dramatic realization than Tu'an Gu and his wife, who are portrayed by *jing* ("painted face" is the conventional English translation; in the Ming, this role-type is closer to the *sheng*/male-lead than to the *chou*/clown type) and *lao dan* (old female lead, designated as *tie* in some editions) performers.

Where the very opening of the *zaju* Orphan presents Tu'an Gu as an unfathomable villain whose relentless and unexplained design of eradicating the Zhao clan is already underway, the "Southern Orphan" uses 21 of its 41 scenes to provide insight into Tu'an Gu's character and motivations. As suggested in the sequence involving the storyteller Zhang Wei in the "Southern Orphan" (scene 10), Tu'an Gu seems again and again to be prevented by just one momentary resentment, or one vindictive thought—or, just as likely, one worry about what his enemies may do if he fails to act ruthlessly and preemptively—from being able to heed his wife's wise and earnest advice to moderate his desires, and to enjoy life in the present, in the pleasant garden of his residential compound. He appears in the "Southern Orphan" less as a monster than as an ambitious man with a slight but fatal lack of self-control.

The *zaju* play represents the conflict between Zhao Dun and Tu'an Gu as one between essentialized opposed forces or personality types, with Zhao Dun representing the civil (*wen*) virtues, while Tu'an Gu is the martial (*wu*) figure. In the "Southern Orphan," this old martial/civil contrast is still detectable, as Tu'an Gu is clearly more violent and less self-possessed than Zhao Dun, but, in the "Southern Orphan," the drive that feeds Tu'an Gu's hatred for Zhao Dun is essentially the same impulse of social striving displayed by a wide range of characters in the play, albeit in Tu'an Gu's case on a grander scale. As he confesses to his wife near the beginning of the play, despite the exalted status and power he enjoys, he simply cannot bear that Zhao Dun is "Upper Grandee" while he is "Lower Grandee" (scene 7).²⁶ His sensitivity on this point is pricked by such minor or seeming slights as the instance where Zhao Dun proceeds with the ritual "exhortation to the farmers" (scene 8) without waiting for him. Class resentment also lies at the core of Tu'an Gu's irrepressible urge to compete with Zhao Dun. Again and again Zhao Dun's lineage is lauded as making him ministerial by birth (*xiang zhong*), while Tu'an Gu is called a commoner (*buyi*) who fought (literally, as a military man) his way to the top, or nearly so—Zhao Dun remains as the last person in the state with higher rank. At one point (scene 13), Zhao Dun himself calls Tu'an Gu an "old country bumpkin," revealing an urbane sophisticate's disdain for an uncultured striver. The rivals contrast as much in class as in character: one enjoys clan privilege dating back seven generations, while the other is a commoner who has

risen to exalted rank through his own energy, ambition, and willingness to run risks.²⁷ Parentage is clearly a pervasive dimension of the “Orphan” tradition as treated in earlier eras, but the “Southern Orphan” makes particularly clear how issues of parentage are also problems of hereditary status and class origin.

To note that the “Southern Orphan” restages the Orphan Zhao story within the world of emulative desire and hidden danger of the urban streets means in effect to acknowledge that it is in the end much more Tu’an Gu’s play than it is Zhao Dun’s (or Zhao Shuo’s, or for that matter the Orphan’s), since Tu’an Gu is clearly much more the figure of the street. Tu’an Gu in this sense shares an affinity with Zhou Jian: both commoners with dreams of grandeur, and both ensnared by webs of political and commercial connections and transactions in the city through their own roving desires. For both, this entanglement in the end proves fatal. Though Zhou Jian succeeds as a corporeal copy of Zhao Shuo, the value of this copy can only be “cashed in” when the body-double dies in place of the real Zhao Shuo; Tu’an Gu succeeds for a brief time in supplanting Zhao Dun as the most powerful minister at the Jin court, but forfeits his life when the chain of intertwined loyalties and rivalries thus set in motion come full circle. The playwright Lü Tiancheng (1580–1618) rendered the oft-cited pronouncement that “the southern drama excels at telling the fate of one person in great detail.”²⁸ If we seek the “one person” whose fate is being told in “great detail” in the “Southern Orphan,” it must be Tu’an Gu, the anti-heroic hero of the play. The fascination of Tu’an Gu’s fate, moreover, derives in large part from the way it reads as a cautionary tale for a wide spectrum of rootless strivers seduced by the allure of the city.



Figure 8.7 Tu'an Gu and Zhao Dun berate each other. From the Shide

Tu'an Gu was familiar to Ming readers through visual representations. [Figure 8.7](#) is an illustration of scene 13, “Tu and Zhao Berate Each Other,” showing Tu'an Gu (on the left) and Zhao Dun (on the right) engaged in a fierce dispute.²⁹ Zhao Dun appears in the attire and bearing of a civil official, while Tu'an Gu is pictured fittingly as a military official, marked by the dangling head piece without the civil official's large square cap; he is also depicted as a brash or even violent man, signaled by the way he wields his *hu*-tablet as if it were a knife.³⁰

新板增補天下使用文林妙錦萬寶全書卷之五

○飭貪簡要錄

方今居官者不以爵位為重不以
祿食艱難若將所得俸祿養家盡
自有餘却乃不守本條貪賍壞法
役身亡家以致寡夫孤子棄父母
諸有之止所食俸祿皆出於民供
計其頃畝牛租合用人力不勝艱
難今將一品至九品俸給數目條
列招示知者觀之

○文武品級月俸

正一品每月支米八十七石

從一品每月支米八十四石

從二品每月支米七十四石

歲該米八百八十八石

官品門



Figure 8.8 Illustration to the chapter “Offices and Ranks.” From the daily-use encyclopedia *Miaojin wanbao quanshu*

Figure 8.8 shows a reuse of this illustration design in a Ming daily-use encyclopedia, *Wondrous Brocade: A Complete Book of Ten Thousand*

Treasures (*Miaojin wanbao quanshu*, 1612).³¹ Here the illustration is adapted to serve as the chapter-heading illustration for a chapter titled “Offices and Ranks” (*Guanpin*). The derivation of this image from Figure 8.7 is clear. This suggests that the editor(s) of the encyclopedia felt that this image of the tension between Tu’an Gu and Zhao Dun was an apt visual emblem for a chapter assembling documentation of the complex nomenclature and hierarchical relations of state bureaucracy. As we saw, the root of the conflict between Zhao Dun and Tu’an Gu, as depicted in the “Southern Orphan,” is “Lower Grandee” Tu’an Gu’s indignation over Zhao Dun’s ranking as “Upper Grandee.” Recalling this specific dramatic tension would evoke the world of “Offices and Ranks” for Ming readers—with a wry acknowledgment of the complex and treacherous world of ambition and envy permeating that world.

The appearance of this illustration in this context reminds us not only of the “Southern Orphan’s” distinctive perspective on the conflict between Zhao Dun and Tu’an Gu, but also of the status of this play among Ming readers as a cultural touchstone. The encyclopedia compilers provide no identifying caption or title for their rendering of the scene, seemingly confident that fully qualified readers of such works would be able to properly summon the rich connotations of the scene from its context in the “Southern Orphan,” through whatever combination it might be of spectatorship, music, reading, urban banter, or any other dimension of the wider world of Ming vernacular culture. It is to this broader context—the place that the “Southern Orphan” occupied within the world of Ming popular culture—that we will turn in the final section.

THE SOCIAL LEGIBILITY OF THE “SOUTHERN ORPHAN” IN THE MING

The “Southern Orphan” was a central reference point in Ming theatrical culture. The *Yongle dadian* (The great compendium of the Yongle reign) included an edition of the “Southern Orphan” (now lost), reflecting the court’s attention as the Ming imperial house was building its theatrical repertoire, policies, and programs. The play also appears in the first Ming treatise on southern drama, Xu Wei’s *Nanci xu lu* (Treatise and catalog of southern lyrics).³² Influential reference works of the day on southern drama, such as Wang Jide’s (1540–1623) *Qulü* (Rules of songs), Lü Tiancheng’s *Qu pin*, and Qi Biaoja’s (1602–45) *Yuanshan tang qupin* (A critical evaluation of songs from the Hall of Distant Mountains) all comment on the play. The earliest extant anthology of songs and dramas of Ming popular theater, *Fengyue jinnang* (Brocade

bag of breezes and moonlight), excerpts ten scenes from the play. A certain Xu Yuan in the Ming is reported to have produced a drastically revised version.³³ Several catalogs of arias and their musical patterns compiled in the Ming and onward, such as *Nan jiugong pu* (Manual of the southern arias in nine modes), also include arias from the “Southern Orphan.” The late-Ming literatus Qi Biaoja mentions in his diary watching a performance of scenes from the play.³⁴ Throughout the Ming, it remained part of a stable repertoire of stage performance, receiving ongoing critical attention, rewriting, and reprinting. As an aside, we might note that the lantern festival and other scenes from the “Southern Orphan” (cited by its *Eight Heroes* title) are also performed in chapter 54 of the *Dream of the Red Chamber* (also known as *Story of the Stone*), the eighteenth-century masterpiece of the traditional Chinese novel.

The “Southern Orphan’s” fluidity and multiplicity of register and voice went hand in hand with trends and models in different spheres of performance in the Ming. In this regard, its connection to the musical program of the imperial court is particularly noteworthy. Lü Tiancheng comments with some justice on the play, “its words are too unadorned.”³⁵ But the play nonetheless includes striking outbursts of ornate and elegant lyricism, most noticeably the princess and Zhao Shuo’s arias on the lantern festival. Their domestic production of lantern lyrics in fact closely mirrors the Ming court’s prolific production of lantern lyrics as part of the state’s musical program promoting the sage ideal of the emperor sharing joy and prosperity with his subjects, demonstrating the potentially edifying power of music discussed by Joseph Lam in the present volume. *Yongxi yuefu* (Songs of harmonious delight), an anthology of songs and music in a high elegant register closely aligned with court musical tastes, places a lantern lyric as its first song. The similarities of diction, motif (such as the coming back of spring to the capital), allusion (such as the immortal lands), and discourse (such as sharing joy with all subjects) between the lantern lyrics in the “Southern Orphan” and those in *Yongxi yuefu* attest to the close ties between musical fashions in the court and those of the southern theater. The inclusion of these lantern lyrics, along with other more action-driven episodes, in the anthology *Fengyue jinnang* points to possible channels whereby the “Southern Orphan” circulates social energy from both the court’s musical programs as well as from local or popular traditions.³⁶

In the meantime, the developing commercial printing industry in the Ming integrated theatrical works more and more tightly into the general experience of reading. In many instances such reading experience involved reading not just scripts but also music, comments and

annotations, and illustrations, bringing theatrical works into relation with other genres of art and literature.³⁷ Here we will focus on interactions or transactions between theater and the novel, another genre that rose quickly in the Ming to become part of the era's distinctive cultural achievement.

The Jiajing reign (1522–66) saw explosive growth in the printing of both dramatic and fictional works. An early edition of the “Southern Orphan” was printed during this period, as was the novel *The Water Margin* (*Shuihu zhuan*). Some features of the “Southern Orphan” gain fuller force when we consider how the play and the novel shed light on one another. The most obvious features shared between the play and the novel are the central thematic notions of *yi* (righteousness, doing right by someone, holding up social contract, justice) and *yingxiong*, hero. Here we can recall that the “Southern Orphan” itself was often known in the Ming as *The Tale of Eight Heroes* (*Ba yi ji*), where the notion of “hero” is compactly conveyed through the single word *yi* itself. Another word in common parlance for “hero,” *yingxiong*, appears nine times in the “Southern Orphan,” four of these instances either applied to or spoken by Tu'an Gu. Of the “Southern Orphan” characters, it is clearly Tu'an Gu who most embodies the “hero complex” of *The Water Margin*. The expression *hao shou zhi zhong cheng hao shou* (showing off your fighting skills among skilled fighters) also best applies to Tu'an Gu, and as it happens also appears in *The Water Margin*.³⁸ That is, both the play and the novel adopt a narrative focus on the struggle to be a “hero among heroes.” If *The Water Margin* famously ranks its one hundred and eight heroes at a climactic moment, the question of ranking and grouping brings to the fore Tu'an Gu's problematic place between the world of outlaw heroes, embodied by *The Water Margin*, and the world of the moral heroes, embodied by the eight heroes in the “Southern Orphan.”

The name “Crimson Cirrus Tower,” given to the palatial dwelling of the Marquis in the “Southern Orphan,” where it appears as an alluring spectacle as well as a treacherous trap for wayfarers in the capital, appears in historical records of the last years of the Northern Song dynasty, where it is recorded as the name of a structure built by emperor Huizong (r. 1101–1126) in his luxurious imperial garden. Huizong's reign, of course, also serves as the historical setting for the *Water Margin* narrative. In chapter 72 of that novel, the bandit leader Song Jiang, yearning to view the capital's legendary lantern festival for himself, leads a group of his men to the capital. In narrating this sequence, the novel inserts several poems depicting the glories of this lantern festival in which Huizong's Crimson Cirrus Tower is prominently featured. The rebels' sojourn as lantern festival viewers leads to a complex set of

audacious and often comical exploits, including impersonation of a palace officer to gain entrance to the imperial palace itself, and Song Jiang's flirtatious encounters with Li Shishi, the renowned courtesan companion of emperor Huizong. The episode ends violently when the impetuous Li Kui, enraged by Song Jiang's cavorting with Li Shishi, begins a fight with imperial officers and burns her house down. In short, the bandits' sojourn to the capital to view the lantern festival could serve as a perfect illustration of the dangers of the festival as laid out in Zhao Dun's memorial at the opening of the "Southern Orphan."



Figure 8.9 *Nandu fanhui tu* (detail). From *Zhongguo lishi bowuguan*, pl. 184

The transplantation of Huizong's "Crimson Cirrus Tower" from *The Water Margin*'s fictionalized early twelfth century to the "Southern Orphan's" still more fictionalized seventh century BCE offers a brilliant literary example of what garden designers might call "borrowed scenery," as well as a reminder of the commonalities in how these two works reflect shared Ming preoccupations about the allure and danger of the early modern cityscape. Paintings such as the commercially produced *Nandu fanhui tu* (Prosperous celebration in the southern metropolis, [Figure 8.9](#)) or *Beggars and Street Characters* ([Figure 8.5](#)), a work by the renowned mid-Ming academic painter Zhou Chen (?–1535) echo and amplify these same fascinations. Urban spectacles such as festivals, buildings, or people on the street, especially commoners on the street, form part of a Ming fascination with urban experience that

crosses the boundaries of several different media and genres, and which is given sustained expression in the “Southern Orphan.”

CONCLUSION

We have seen how the “Southern Orphan’s” reworking of the orphan Zhao story deemphasizes the clear-cut certainties of injustice vengeance in favor of a worldview in which the main moral imperative is to regulate one’s own socially emulative desires. To Ming readers of various stations, such a cautionary tale would have hit close to home, as their society underwent radical change, and as new social opportunities and pitfalls confronted them. The world of the “Southern Orphan” is one in which the glorious spectacles as well as the hidden dangers of the urban panorama entice and imperil both the highest and the lowest characters who fall into its orbit. Both the dramatic world of the “Southern Orphan” as well as its evolving function within the broader Ming cultural world remind us of the intertwining of multiple domains of social practice and cultural production, reflected, in the case of the “Southern Orphan,” not only in its primary media of music and theatrical performance, but also in such far-ranging fields as painting, imperial fashion, novelistic narrative, as well as the repurposing and referencing of these spheres in the fashions of urban gossip and banter.

A telling indication of the “Southern Orphan’s” role as a commonly shared cultural touchstone appears in a Ming drinking game. This game, which circulated in literary miscellanies and daily-use encyclopedias, requires players to compose a rhyming answer satisfying the following rule: “This game requires something that is eternally green through all four seasons, followed by something that can dissolve sorrows and fend off boredom, and a conclusion with two names of persons from antiquity.” One model answer is provided as follows:

What is eternally green through all four seasons is the willow;

the thing that can dissolve sorrows and fend off boredom is wine.

And if you ask of ancients—

Old Woman Wang firmly clutches Zhou Jian’s hand.³⁹

Drinking games in the Ming drew on the stock of shared cultural references of their time.⁴⁰ The above drinking game demonstrates that Zhou Jian and Old Woman Wang—characters appearing nowhere in the ancient records of the Zhao family story nor in the *zaju* Orphan of Zhao—had graduated, via the widespread popularity and influence of the

“Southern Orphan,” to the status of emblematic figures from “antiquity.” As our examination of the Orphan tradition has shown, the construction of this “antiquity” was a central process of Ming culture, and one brought into play a constellation of preoccupations and modes of expression uniquely belonging to that age.

NOTES

- 1 On the issue of the Ming as the time when plays, both new and ancient, were committed to print and thereby both preserved and radically transformed, see Wilt Idema, “Why You Never Have Read a Yuan Drama: The Transformation of *Zaju* at the Ming Court,” *Studi in onore di Lanciello Lanciotti* (Napoli: Istituto Universitario Orientale, Dipartimento di Studi Asiatici, 1996), 765–91.
- 2 For studies on leading literati of the Ming and their *fugu* movement, see Chen Shulu, *Mingdai qianhou qizi yanjiu* (Nanchang: Jiangxi renmin chubanshe, 1994); Liao Kebin, *Mingdai wenxue fugu yundong yanjiu* (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2008); Zhang Weibao, *Mingdai wenxue fugu yu gexin yantaohui lunwen ji* (Hong Kong: Xinya yanjiusuo, 2001); Zheng Lihua, *Qianhou qizi yanjiu* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2015).
- 3 On the rise of vernacular literature in the late imperial Chinese book market and late imperial Chinese block-printing in general, see, e.g., articles in Cynthia Brokaw and Kai-wing Chow, *Printing and Book Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005); Robert Hegel, *Reading Illustrated Fiction in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998); Patricia Sieber, *Theaters of Desire: Authors, Readers and the Reproduction of Early-Chinese Song Drama* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2003).
- 4 For Greenblatt, “social energy” refers to things (“power, charisma, sexual excitement, collective dreams, wonder, desire, anxiety, religious awe, free-floating intensities of experience”) that move through society powered by “the capacity of certain verbal, aural, and visual traces” that produces, shapes, and organizes “collective physical and mental experience.” See Greenblatt, “The Circulation of Social Energy,” in *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), 1–20.
- 5 This form is called “southern drama” because of the regional derivation of the main musical and performance repertoires from which it is composed. Although I will use the term “southern drama” or *nanxi* throughout this essay, note that scholars generally further differentiate later refinements of the *nanxi* form by Ming literati (especially works in the singing style of Kun opera) as *chuanqi*. Of the three key early editions of the “Southern Orphan” (see note 8 below), Mao Jin’s *Ba yi ji* would generally be considered a *chuanqi* play.
- 6 On the *zaju* version of the Orphan of Zhao story, see, e.g., Stephen West and Wilt Idema, *The Orphan of Zhao and Other Yuan Plays: The Earliest Known Versions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014). The story of the Orphan of Zhao has continued to be reworked and restaged down to the present day, including a production by Tian Qinxin in the twenty-first century with some characteristics of postmodern theater. On an overall history of the transformation of the Orphan Zhao story, see Shiao-ling Yu, “To Revenge or Not to Revenge? Seven Hundred

- 7 The prevalent assumption at any rate is that the *zaju* version was in circulation before the *nanxi* version, though even this has been disputed (see Luo Di, “Juzuo de shidai tezheng: Cong *Pipa ji*, *Zhaoshi gu’er* wei nan-Song shi xiwen shuokaigu,” *Xi wen* 6 (1997), 55–7). For a history and comparison of various editions of the “Southern Orphan,” see Wu Gan, “*Quan yuan xiqu* ‘Zhaoshi gu’er ji’ jijiao shangque,” *Xuzhou shifan daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)*, 4 (1999), 7–12; Wu Ge, and Deng Ruiqiong, “*Ba yi ji bianzheng*,” *Wenxue yichan*, 4 (1983), 110–16; Jing Lihu, “Yuan dai nanxi *Zhaoshi gu’er ji* de zhongyao jiazhi ji banben yuanliu,” *Zhongshan daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 2 (1993), 100–106; Li Xiuyan, “Yuan Ming shiqi ‘Zhaoshi gu’er’ gushi xiqu wenben yanbian yanjiu” (M.A. Thesis Sichuan shifan daxue, 2014); Luo Di, “Juzuo de shidai tezheng: Cong *Pipa ji*, *Zhaoshi gu’er* wei nan-Song shi xiwen shuokaigu,” *Xi wen* 6 (1997), 55–57.
- 8 Key editions of the “Southern Orphan” in the Ming include one by the printshop Fuchun tang, one by the printshop Shide tang, and one by the famous bibliophile and printer Mao Jin (1599–1659). While all surviving early editions of the play date from the Ming, and thus would naturally reflect a degree of Ming editing and rewriting, Mao Jin’s edition, from late in the dynasty, reflects a heightened scope of intervention in the text, leading some scholars to view his edition as the most characteristic of specifically Ming preoccupations` (see for example the article by Jing Lihu cited above at note 7).
- 9 The general tendency in the Ming seems to have been for *zaju* plays to become increasingly the sphere of theater connoisseurs and of private reading as opposed to stage performance, while the *nanxi* (and later *chuanqi*) traditions came to occupy the central position in theatrical performance. On these broader questions, see Wilt Idema and Lloyd Haft, *A Guide to Chinese Literature* (Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Chinese Studies, 1997), chapters 17, “*Qu: Zhugongdiao, Zaju* and *Sanqu*, and *Xiwen*,” 165–84, and 19, “*Zaju, Chuanqi*, and Regional Drama,” 191–7.
- 10 In early sources “Tu’an” is this figure’s surname and “Gu” his given name, though Ming popular texts often treat “Tu” as his surname and “Angu” as his given name (in fact this is the consistent practice in the Ming “Southern Orphan” scripts). For the sake of continuity and of coherence with other discussions of this material, however, I will render the name throughout this essay as “Tu’an Gu.”
- 11 On the formal characters of *zaju* and *nanxi*, see Stephen West, “Drama,” in William Nienhauser et al., eds., *The Indiana Companion to Traditional Chinese Literature*, (Taipei: Southern Materials Center, 1986), 13–30.
- 12 The eight heroes in the play are: Zhou Jian, Zhang Wei (or Cheng Ying’s son according to some scholars), Chu Ni, Ti Miming, Ling Zhe, Han Jue, Gongsun Chujui, and Cheng Ying. Whereas most of these dramatist personae are attested in the historical sources for the story and the *zaju* version, Zhou Jian and Zhang Wei, two heroes of commoner status, appear to be new creations particular to the “Southern Orphan” tradition.
- 13 These editions do differ in areas such as the division of scenes, specific arias, and comical interludes. For comparative studies of various editions of the “Southern Orphan,” see the bibliography provided above at note 7.
- 14 On the changes in urban planning in the Song capital Kaifeng, see Wu Liangyong, *A Brief History of Ancient Chinese City Planning* (Kassel: Gesamthochschulbibliothek, 1986), 40–49.

- 15 *Yuan qu xuan tu*, Wanli edition.
- 16 *Zhaoshi gu'er ji*, Shide tang edition, scenes 33, 40.
- 17 *Ba yi ji*, scene 41, p. 96. All quotations and scene numbers of the “Southern Orphan” are from *Ba yi ji*, in Mao Jin, *Liushi zhong qu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1958), vol. 2.
- 18 *Ba yi ji*, scene 2, page 2. Line-breaks are used in the rendering given here to reflect the highly rhythmical and antithetical phrasing of the memorial. The court statements by Zhao Dun and Tu'an Gu (the latter discussed below) in the “Southern Orphan” reflect a contrast between the former's elegant and literary style and the latter's blunter and more prosaic expression.
- 19 *Ba yi ji*, scene 2, page 3.
- 20 *Ba yi ji*, scene 4, page 6.
- 21 This telling socioeconomic detail is noted in the late-Ming *Ba yi ji* text edited by Mao Jin, but absent in the earlier Fuchun tang and Shide tang editions.
- 22 *Ba yi ji*, scene 5, page 9. In the Fuchun tang and Shide tang editions, the second line is spoken by Cheng Ying.
- 23 This dialogue thus also serves as a “low” echo of the scene in the main plot when Cheng Ying shows the scroll painting to the Orphan, who asks Cheng Ying the identity of various characters in the scroll in a similar fashion.
- 24 In fact in the “Overnight Worry” interlude as well we can detect the reworking of another previously unmined detail from the same passage in the *Zuo zhuan* narrative, which describes how the evil Marquis once killed a cook for having failed to braise his bear-paw thoroughly.
- 25 This “25 paragons of filial piety” interlude is from Mao Jin's *Ba yi ji* edition. In the earlier Fuchun tang and Shide tang editions, Zhao Shuo and the princess are entertained with a puppet show instead.
- 26 It transpires that another hero, Gongsun Chujiu, once held the post of “Middle Grandee,” but he has retired from court in protest over the Marquis's egregious rule before the play's opening.
- 27 Incidentally, rising through the military ranks was a widespread mode of social mobility in the Ming, and some of the best-known playwrights, such as Xu Wei (1521–93) maintained close relations with military officials, especially in the late Ming. I am grateful to Kenneth Swope for bringing my attention to this point.
- 28 Lü Tiancheng, *Qu pin*, in *Zhongguo gudian xiqu lunzhu jicheng*, vol. 6 (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1959), 209.
- 29 “Tu and Zhao Berate Each Other” is the scene title in the Shide tang edition; the Mao Jin edition (i.e., *The Tale of Eight Heroes*) captions this image “Xuanzi (i.e. Zhao Dun) Remonstrates at Court.”
- 30 The *hu* is a long narrow tablet, made of various materials, that was used as a writing surface and ritual prop for ministers at court appearances before a ruler.
- 31 The “daily-use encyclopedia” was a popular publication genre in late Ming China. Divided into chapters such as “Heavenly Patterns,” “Geography,” “Human Affairs,” “All Barbarians” and so forth, these books claim to cover all possible topics (from geography to history, dream interpretation to legal advice, calligraphy to painting, religions to games, etc.) one might need to know about in one's everyday dealings. One of the most recurrent claims made in advertising these publications was that they could enable their owners to master fields of knowledge and expertise, as well as social roles, regardless of prior social status or education.

- 32 On Xu Wei, see also note 27 above.
- 33 Mao Jin's *Liushi zhong qu* lists Xu Yuan as the author of its edition of *Ba yi ji*. Modern scholarship, however, suggests that Mao Jin's version is actually not the same as Xu Yuan's. See Wu Ge and Deng Ruiqiong, "*Ba yi ji* bianzheng."
- 34 Qi Biaoja, *Qi bei rong yan*, 44A, in *Qi Zhongmin gong riji* (Shaoxing: Shaoxing xian xiuzhi weiyuanhui, 1937).
- 35 Lü Tiancheng, *Qu pin*, 225.
- 36 Both *Yongxi yuefu* and *Fengyue jinnang* were compiled in the Jiajing reign.
- 37 On illustrated drama books of the Ming, see Li-ling Hsiao, *The Eternal Present of the Past: Illustration, Theater, and Reading in the Wanli Period, 1573–1619* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).
- 38 This phrase appears in scene 41 in *The Tale of Eight Heroes* and chapter two in *The Water Margin*. See Shi Naian, *Zhongyi shuihu quanshu*, chapter two, 22A. In *The Water Margin*, the phrase appears in a slightly varied form "*hou shou zhong jian cheng hao shou*." We should note that *The Water Margin* existed in different editions in the Ming, some of which do not include this line. The sentiment, however, is clearly a part of the *Water Margin*'s narrative world.
- 39 *Boxiao zhuji* (Pearls to evoke laughter), a block-printed text of the Ming, 1.5A–5B. "Old Woman Wang" is here written "Old Woman Huang," but this is simply a graphic substitution, since the two surnames are homophones in many Ming (and modern) regional dialects.
- 40 For the role of drinking games in Ming culture and the book where the specific game under discussion appears, see chapter one in Yuming He, *Home and the World: Editing the "Glorious Ming" in Woodblock-Printed Books of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2013), 8–73.

CHAPTER 9

THEATER AND SOCIETY IN THE MING WORLD



Hsiao Li-ling

In the thirteenth century, the poet Du Renjie (ca. 1201–82) describes in his *sungu* poem “A Peasant Knows Naught the Theater” a country bumpkin baffled by theatrical performance during his visit to the city. Apart from the humor, Du parades the peasant’s unfamiliarity with the theater and his utter confusion about the stage’s simulated reality. The peasant’s confusion arises not from a calculated ontological reflection, but from his inexperience of the theatrical arts. This inexperience suggests a social reality against which the poem’s humor could be understood.

By 1644, however, the peasants became the essential participants of the thriving theatrical culture, and country bumpkins were no longer confused by the theater’s simulated reality. Zhang Dai, whose musical exploits are chronicled herein by Joseph Lam (1597–1679), recorded in this memoir *Tao’an mengyi* a performance of Gao Ming’s (ca. 1305–59) *Pipa ji* at the Temple of Yanzhu at Taoyan near modern Shaoxing:

On five consecutive nights, there were theatrical performances at the Temple. The actors belonged to the best troupes in Yue district and Hangzhou, and earned as

much as ten thousand *qian*. The troupes performed *Bojie* [*Pipa ji*] and *Jingchai ji*. There was an old gentleman sitting in front of the stage who compared the actor's delivery to the words in the book. The actors omitted a single word. The audience heckled and the performance had to be started all over again. Thus the troupes from Yue district developed the reputation for performing "the complete *Bojie*" and the "complete *Jingchai*."¹

This passage suggests that by the end of the Ming dynasty theater had become a daily familiarity, and was prevalent in both cities and rural areas. It was enjoyed by people from all walks of life, including peasants who had formerly been so baffled by theatrical arts but now had developed a high textual consciousness. Even popular performances in temple fairs were held to a strict standard of textual integrity. Du Renjie's humor of the country bumpkin's confusion would have been lost on the audience of the Ming dynasty.

This chapter introduces the theater's relation with the life of all social classes and its ability to blur the boundaries of high and popular cultures. It discusses the relations of theater and the court, the literati, and the peasants, all of which complicated a conflicted view relation: theater was an indicator of prosperity and simultaneously a sign of moral corruption.

THE CONFLICTED RELATIONS BETWEEN THE COURT AND THEATER

The founding emperor of the Ming dynasty Zhu Yuanzhang (reigned 1368–98) loved the play *Pipa ji* so much that he attempted to recruit the playwright Gao Ming after he assumed the throne.² The emperor's partiality arose from his high approval of the play's didactic function: "The Five Classics, Four Books, cloth and fabrics, and millet and grains are seen in every household. Gao Ming's *Pipa ji* is like the rarities of the mountain and of the sea, the rich and the noble houses cannot do without it."³

With this high regard, the emperor ordered a daily performance of the play.⁴ Although he was partial only to one play, the decreed daily performance no doubt opened great opportunities for other plays, and inspired theatrical fervors among the aristocrats. For example, Emperor Xianzong (reigned 1465–87) constantly ordered a theatrically skilled eunuch to perform,⁵ Zhu Yuanzhang's sixth grandson Zhu Youdun (1379–1439) wrote 31 plays, all of which survived in the original printed anthology *Chengzhai yuefu*, and was hailed as the most important *zaju* playwright of the Ming dynasty.⁶

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE MUSIC BUREAU

Following the dynastic precedence, Zhu Yuanzhang established the Music Bureau in the Ministry of Rites in his capital Jinling. The Music Bureau managed the musical and theatrical performances in court rituals and entertainments. His son Emperor Chengzu (reigned 1403–24), after usurping his nephew's throne, likewise established the Music Bureau in his new capital Beijing. In 1407, he announced ten holidays to celebrate the Lantern Festival, during which the Bureau displayed an array of different theatrical performances.⁷ This created a custom of theatrical extravaganzas during Lantern Festivals in Ming society.

The Bureau offered dance, music, and theatrical performances during state banquets held for foreign dignitaries, newly minted degree winners, officials with high merits, newly appointed Hanlin academicians, and others.⁸ For example, Peng Shi recorded in his inauguration ceremony that, according to custom, contributions for a banquet to celebrate new appointees were collected from officials of all ranks during a period of one month. The theatrical performance was the focus of this celebratory occasion.⁹ By 1585 the Bureau's entertainments had expanded to include all the princes' households, and its duties to religious offerings, weddings of the imperial family, and private entertainments of the court ladies.¹⁰ Due to the popularity of the Bureau, by 1435, the personnel of the two Bureaus in Beijing and in Jinling had increased dramatically so that the newly inaugurated Emperor Yingzong (1427–64) ordered the release of more than 3,800 performers out of the court.¹¹

This large number of performers prodigiously increased the popularity of theater, but simultaneously compounded the problems of excessiveness, over-indulgence in pleasure seeking, and moral corruption, which led to attempts to ban theatrical performances. He Qin, an official during the Hongzhi reign (1488–1505), considered curtailing the theatrical performances at court, but he gave it up, realizing that the resistance from the aristocrats and officials was too great.¹² The actual bans were proposed later, first by Ge Duan (1505–78) whose proposal was accepted by Emperor Muzong (reigned 1567–72). Ge's ban was ineffectual, so Shen Li (1531–1615) proposed another in 1585 or 1586, but likewise to no avail.¹³

THEATER AS A SIGN OF PROSPERITY AND CORRUPTION

Various *biji* show that emperors' virtues were key to defining the

relations between the court and theater. This accords with the common perceptions that virtuous emperors created eras of prosperity, and theater became the metaphor for this prosperity. For example, Xie Zhaozhi (1567–1624) sees the 16 towers that Zhu Yuanzhang built to house the entertainers in Jinling as a sign of prosperity as they signify the glorious reign and the founding emperor's encouragement of culture and literature by providing means of entertainment for the gentry and officials. Xie further sees the restrictions on music and dance that limited the entertainers' means of living as signs of lost prosperity.¹⁴ The implication is that society was not prosperous enough for entertainments.

Ni Qian recorded in his emissary trip to Korea in 1450 that before he arrived at Pyongyang, the local officials staged a welcoming performance to show the celebratory and ceremonial nature of his visit.¹⁵ The official welcoming banners praised peace and prosperity, possibly of both kingdoms. Theatrical performances were further presented as he moved further into Korean territory.¹⁶ These theatrical performances certainly underline the idea that the theater served as a metaphor for peace and prosperity, not only in China but in East Asia more broadly, attesting to the cultural influence of the Ming as noted in Edward Farmer's chapter in this volume.

Theater, however, was also seen as the source of moral corruption, especially for emperors. One day, as recorded by Li Qing, Emperor Shenzong (Wanli, reigned 1572–1620) entertained himself with theater and hurriedly stopped it when he heard a voice announcing that the censor was inspecting the city. The emperor pronounced that he was in fear of the censor who would presumably consider the theatrical entertainment improper.¹⁷ After the fall of the Ming dynasty, General Zuo Liangyu (1599–1645), in his proclamation to clear the emperor of his evil officials, lists recruiting and presenting performers to distract the emperor as one of Ma Shiyong (1591–1646) and Ruan Dacheng's (1587–1646) crimes.¹⁸ The theater's relation with the emperors of the Ming dynasty went through a great change from demonstrations of the founding emperors' virtues to manifestations of the later emperors' supposed moral corruption.

ACTOR ZANG XIAN ABUSES POWER IN THE ZHENGDE REIGN (1506–21)

In common perception, the emperor who most infamously indulged in theatrical entertainments was Emperor Wuzong (Zhengde, r. 1506–21)

who notoriously disregarded his duties and indulged in pleasurable pursuits. He was notorious for allowing his chief eunuch Liu Jin (1451–1510) and Chief of Music Bureau Zang Xian (fl. sixteenth century) to manipulate powers. The eunuch Liu Jin allegedly got the heir apparent's attention through a theatrical performance.¹⁹ He won Emperor Wuzong's favor and in consequence gained significant political power. While the realities are far more complex, association with the theater was used to highlight both the emperor's and the eunuch's evils.²⁰

Emperor Wuzong further showed partiality towards his favorite actor Zang Xian.²¹ Wuzong gave Zang a high position and allowed him to transgress the entertainers' strict dress codes. According to Shen Defu, in the Yuan dynasty the chief of the Music Bureau was the third rank and called Officer of Music (*Yunshao Daifu*) to differentiate this office from other offices. In the Ming dynasty, the position was the lowest (ninth rank) and called "Serving the Imperial Carriage" (*Fengluan*). The Ming laws regulated a clear dress code: in court, all entertainers must wear the green head kerchief decorated with swastikas and green and red arm guards; and at home, they must wear a green head turban. Wuzong, however, granted Zang the privilege of wearing the cap and belt of the first rank.²² He even brought Zang along on his inspection tour of Jiangnan.²³ Shen Defu could not but sigh alas, and lamented on this odd partiality.

Having the emperor's ear, Zang Xian allegedly became audacious, presumptuous, and power hungry. During the inspection tour of Jiangnan, Zang socialized with officials of Jinling and Prince Ning, Zhu Chenhou (1470–1520), who received him with high respect. Prince Ning even addressed Zang by his courtesy name Liangzhi, a privilege forbidden to actors.²⁴ Encouraged by this social elevation, Zang proposed to restore a former law that actors merely implicated in crimes were cleared of any fault. Even when a crime was committed, only the Minister of Rites had the right to prosecute while no judicial department could apprehend them. The court officials who wished to be on Zang's good side recommended this proposal, and the emperor restored this law.²⁵

Furthermore, Zang allegedly interfered with the appointments of personnel. Some officials who lost their positions due to corruption, such as Zhou Huichou (n.d.) and Sun Qingzhe (n.d.), bribed Zang who then successfully pleaded their cases to the emperor.²⁶ Yang Xunji (1456–1544) who won his *jinshi* degree in 1484, retired soon after he served briefly as a clerk in the Ministry of Rites. Through Zang's recommendation, Yang waited on Wuzong at Jinling during the inspection tour. Yang thus composed plays and songs for the occasion,

and mingled with the theatrical professionals. Wuzong was very pleased with him. However, despite his efforts Yang failed to get any new appointment. Zang pleaded and Wuzong appointed Yang an acting position in Music Bureau. Yang felt ashamed, regretted his actions, and pleaded to retire. However, Wuzong did not grant his wish until Zang again pleaded on Yang's behalf.²⁷ Yang hoped to gain advancement through an actor, and ended up with an acting position that stripped him the glory of his *jinshi* degree. Shen Defu criticized him as a sycophant,²⁸ and lamented Zang's power of hiring and firing court officials.²⁹

Zang befriended Prince Ning during the inspection tour. Prince Ning planned to usurp the throne, and thus courted Zang to be his spy.³⁰ Prince Ning flattered Zang by seeing him as an equal. Even when his connection with Prince Ning was revealed, Zang managed to escape the death penalty. Wuzong only punished him with beating and permanent exile. On his journey to exile, all local officials welcomed him with delight and high respect. When he journeyed to Jinan, the officials even went out of the city to feast him. After he finally arrived at Guangxi, his exile location, Prince Ning was afraid that Zang would expose his secrets, and secretly had him murdered at the Zhang Family's Bay.³¹

Zang's biography is like the play he staged. It featured plots of a lowly person rising up the political ladder, court intrigues, abuse of power, usurpation, and murder. In the literal sense, he rose dramatically and ended dramatically. Theater was simultaneously his salvation and his ruin. Zang's interference with court affairs became a lesson for the later Emperor Wanli, who, according to Liu Ruoyu, avoided the catastrophe of actors interfering with politics, despite being criticized for interference by eunuchs, negligence of court duties, and a general pursuit of pleasure.³²

THE END OF THE DYNASTY

The trope of theater corrupting politics culminated in the Southern Ming court. Emperor Hongguang, who assumed the throne largely through the machinations of Ruan Dacheng and Ma Shiyong, became a controversial leader. In the famous play *The Peach Blossom Fan*, the playwright Kong Shangren (1648–1718) used theater to ridicule the emperor as a worthless fool devoting his one-year reign to stage Ruan's play *The Swallow Letter*. The play further presents Ruan as a villain who corrupts Hongguang with theater.³³ But Li Qing in *Sanyuan biji* attempts to uphold Hongguang's integrity. Li records that Emperor Hongguang saw agriculture as the foundation of society and abolished

the customary theatrical performance as he thought that it degraded the integrity of the Plow Rituals.³⁴ Despite Li's effort, the success of *The Peach Blossom Fan* has turned both Hongguang and Ruan Dacheng into villains, with theater symbolizing their decadent corruption. According to Xia Yunchun in *Xu Xincun lu*, Emperor Hongguang (r. 1645–46) appointed Ruan Dacheng as the Minister of Military. Ruan thus led a ceremony of harangue troupes upon the river. Ruan wore a mandarin robe (*sumang*) decorated with green jade, and the participants ridiculed him as robed in theatrical costume. Xia further records that when the Manchus conquered Jinling, Liu Rushi (1618–64), a famous courtesan who married the celebrated poet Qian Qianyi (1582–1664), entered the gate in a foreign robe with feathers adorning her helmet, resembling Wang Zhaojun's theatrical costume in the play *Mingfei chusai*. Xia laments how a state should fall, with participants in such important military and state ceremonies costumed like theatrical performers.³⁵

THE LITERATI'S LOVE OF THEATER

As theater became a court fashion, the scholar-officials inevitably shared this love of theater. The following anecdotes embody the literati's fervor. Shen Defu remarked in his entry "The Superfluous Skills of the Gentry" that in their leisure the literati devoted their energies and intelligence to music and play writing. Famous literati in the Wu region were all good at writing theatrical arias, and their skills even shamed the famous theatrical professionals who performed nervously for them.³⁶ Tang Xianzu was probably the most celebrated literati who engaged in play writing after retirement from officialdom. He composed his renowned play *The Peony Pavilion* right after his early retirement in 1598.

The theatrical fervor even makes a scholar evade the proper duties. Xu Fuzuo in *Huadang Ge congtao* notes that his friend Qin Silin was proficient in Jin and Yuan dramas and would always sing, whether alone or sharing wine. When he travelled to the exam, he packed only two plays, *Pipa ji* and *Xixiang ji*. Qin replied to his friends' advice to focus on the exam that he was concerned only about the poor quality of the singing rather than the deficiencies of his exam essays.³⁷ In this case, theater was like modern television, distracting children from their required course of studies. Only when it became a major pastime could theater, like television, acquire such power of distraction.

Theater thus defined the literati's leisurely lifestyle. For example, theater and leisurely activities such as tea drinking were juxtaposed. Xu Ciyu in *Chashu* (Tea Matters) indicates that tapping to the beat of drama arias while drinking tea was an essential enjoyment. But when a

theatrical performance commences, one should stop drinking so the tea tasting would not be undermined.³⁸ The literati would also involve performers in their leisurely activities. Yuan Zhongdao notes he and his friends brought a troupe with them when they travelled to East Mountain. While resting by the river, they enjoyed listening to the mixed sounds of music and flowing water.³⁹ In his visit to Wei Qi's Garden Wan, Yuan and Li Kaifu summoned a famous troupe to stage the play *Shanhu ji*.⁴⁰ Bi Shilang asked Yuan and Qin Jing to share a drink and appreciate the lily pads in his garden. It rained, and the raindrops on the lily pads made tinkling sounds. Bi thus had his own theatrical troupe performed Kun operas.⁴¹ These anecdotes show that the pairing of performance and leisurely activities was essential in the literati's daily life, and theatrical troupes were readily available to serve them at anytime and anywhere.

As they were constantly together in their leisurely gatherings, the literati and theatrical professionals thus socialized with each other regardless of their respective social statuses. For example, the literatus Zhang Dai and his brother invited a male prostitute Wang Cen along with several actors—including Yang Si and Xu Mengya—and a ball-kicker Zhang Dalai to visit the Temple of Yan Zhu together. When the group arrived, Zhang performed the ball-kicking with his unique skills that dazzled the audience, while the rest of the group performed four scenes from the play *Baitu ji*. Their excellent acting garnered praise from the temple visitors.⁴²

THEATRICAL PERFORMANCES AT BANQUETS AND ON BOATS

Theatrical performances were a common feature of banquets, which most frequently threw literati and theatrical professionals together. According to Wang Shizhen, the gentry of the Henan and Northern Hui regions had a long history of staging performances at banquets. Theatrical performances were to help down the wine as highlighted in the Chinese term *youshang*. Gu Qiyuan notes that the banquets given at the homes of the noble, the gentry, and the rich always featured theatrical performances. In Jinling, before the Wanli reign the smaller banquets featured drama arias with three or four performers, while the big banquets featured theatrical performances with full *yuanben* plays. But after the Wanli era, the smaller banquets featured arias from Kun Opera accompanied by either a clapper, a fan, or a drum, while the big banquets featured only the southern operas in Yiyang or Haiyan styles.⁴³

The anecdotes recorded in the various miscellaneous notes attest to the popular coupling of banquets with theatrical performances. Xu Fuzuo records the activities of wine drinking, poetry compositions, and drama discussions in a banquet given by the playwright Zhang Fengyi's younger brother Youyu.⁴⁴ When he attended Wang Weinan's banquet, Yuan Zhongdao saw the performance of the play *The Golden Hairpin*.⁴⁵ Yuan again saw a contemporary play performed during a banquet given by an imperial family member.⁴⁶ On New Year's Day 1610, Yuan and his friends Han Qiuzhong and He Hanbo crashed a banquet and watched actors from Wu perform the play *Bayi ji*.⁴⁷ At casual dinner parties, theatrical performance certainly enhanced the sense of leisure in the literati's daily lives.

Boating was a major leisure activity in the south. The boats provided transportation for the literati's outings, and spaces to entertain friends with banquets and theatrical performances. Wang Qi notes that boats in scenic spots carrying performers were omnipresent between green waves and red pavilions, while music mixed with the noise of the city.⁴⁸ Yuan Zhongdao records in his diary *Youju shilu* numerous instances involving boating, banqueting, and theater together. He crashed Marquis Anyuan's boat party and ended up staying on the boat for the night.⁴⁹ When he celebrated the launching of his own new boat, Yuan likewise hosted performances, while many bystanders watched the theatrical spectacle from the riverbank.⁵⁰ Yuan also records his repeated experiences in overhearing aria singing emitting from boats: once on his way home from the banquet given by Wu Bolin, and once during a stay on a boat in his journey to Wuchang. He realized that not only did the wise enjoy the water as Confucians claimed, but all people regardless of classes were happy around water.⁵¹ Yuan's anecdotes also manifest the mingling of high and low cultures during the Ming era, as demonstrated in several other chapters in the present volume.

As boating featured theatrical performances, unique boats were designed to accommodate the banquet, the performance, and the performers. Zhang Dai, in *Tao'an mengyi*, introduced a luxurious boat commissioned by Bao Hansuo that featured three towers. The largest tower housed the banquet hall, the performing hall, and the child actors, the second tower contained books and paintings, and the smallest tower contained the beauties. When guests visited the boat, the child actors staged plays and the musicians played instruments. It was such a great spectacle that the audiences on the banks would chase after the boat.⁵²

Apart from the three-towered boat, another method of solving the confined space problem was to stage the performance on one boat and to seat the audience on another. The two boats are generally called the

“the painted twin-boats” (*huafang*).⁵³ Yuan Zhongdao records that Lu Shen (1477–1544) had just such “painted twin-boats.” Yuan chanced upon a letter on which Lu reported that he bought two boats, one for the guests and the other for performers, who accompanied Lu and his friends on boating trips to beautiful scenic areas.⁵⁴

Zhang Dai’s *The Untied Garden* was the most famous theatrical boat. His memoir *Tao’an mengyi* includes numerous performances on this boat. The most productive social gatherings of the literati were called *yaji*, literally meaning “elegant gatherings,” in which the participants not only demonstrated their talents in arts, music, and writing but also frequently led to the productions of poems and essays, calligraphies, and paintings. These elegant gatherings often took place in scenic locations, but most frequently in gardens. As Zhang perceived his boat to be a garden, it was natural for such gatherings to occur. In the tenth month of 1634, Zhang travelled on *The Untied Garden* with an actor Zhu Chusheng to see the autumn leaves. When the boat arrived at the Bridge of Fixed Fragrance, he received eight unexpected guests for whom he gave a banquet. The group then spontaneously engaged in activities that resembled an “elegant gathering.” This accidental gathering was recorded in Zhang’s vivid language:

The renowned figure painter Chen Hongshou painted a portrait of Buddha for Zhao Chunqing, who in turned was portrayed by the famous portrait painter Zeng Jing. Yang Yumin played the three-stringed guitar and Lu Jiu the straight bamboo flute to accompany Luo San’s aria singing. Afterwards, Yumin took out his sandalwood clapper and sang the play *Jinping mei* in the northern musical style that dazzled everybody. That night, actors Peng Tianxi, Luo San, and Yumin performed a play in the local dialect, which was wonderful. They then performed with Zhu Chusheng, and an actress Chen Suzhi improvised an act, which again was excellent. Chen Hongshou sang a village folksong. I played *guqin* to match his tune. Chunqing smiled and said that “it is regrettable that I do not have any talent to help you down the wine.” I replied: “In the Tang dynasty, the general Pei Min retired to observe the mourning rites. He asked Wu Daozi to paint the Heavenly Palace on a wall for his deceased mother. Daozi said: ‘General, please perform the sword dance for me so the fierce force could penetrate the underworld.’ Min thus took off his mourning clothes, rolled up his sleeve, and mounted the horse to gallop. He threw his sword high into the sky more than ten feet. The sword shot down like the lightning. He used the sheath to catch it, and the sword penetrated the roof and entered the sheath perfectly. The viewers were all terrified. Daozi then waved his sleeve like the wind, and finished his wall painting in an instant. Now, Hongshou has painted a Buddha for Chunqing. So it is perfect for Chunqing to do the sword dance.” Chunqing jumped up, grabbed a thirty-pound bamboo rod, and did several rounds of Huxuan Dance. He ended the dance with a big smile.⁵⁵

These leisurely elegant gatherings allow the literati to bathe in the aesthetic environments and activities within each other’s company, and yielded much productivity in the arts and literature. Zhang’s *Untied*

Garden could even accommodate unusual activities such as the Huxuan Dance, a dance consisting of very quick and powerful turns. The forceful dance did not affect the steadiness of the boat, which indeed lived up to its namesake.

THE FASHION OF FAMILY THEATRICAL TROUPES

As performers and theatrical troupes were present at all social occasions, training one's own servants in the performing arts became a fashion in the Ming dynasty. Wang Qi records in *Yupu zaji* that in recent years the young men of the powerful and the rich all made their servants learn the arts of performance.⁵⁶ As they defined their lives in aesthetic terms, the literati likewise had their servants become adept in music and theatricals. The late Ming literatus and drama critic He Liangjun was famous for his theatrically talented servants.⁵⁷ With servants who were skilled at performing, the aria singing could take place at any time and in any location. For example, Yuan Zhongdao invited his brother and friends to tour Shizhou on his boat. After they had fun in finding precious stones on the rocks, he ordered his servant, who just cooked their food, to sing a song spontaneously.⁵⁸ Yu Youfeng, according to Zhou Hui, also had a singing servant to provide musical entertainment for his relatives and friends on a hot summer day.⁵⁹ The servant then was not only there to serve but also to entertain his master and the guests.

The musically talented servant could even earn bread with their arts. Zhang Dai tells us about just such a servant. Qi Zhixiang had all kinds of proclivities, including plays and the theater. Qi loved theater and music so much that he devoted great energies to teaching a foreigner that he named as Ah-Bao to master aria singing.⁶⁰ After the fall of Jinling in 1646, Qi lost everything and relied on Ah-Bao's singing to beg their way home.⁶¹ Ah-Bao not only served as a domestic performer, but became the key bread-winner to sustain his master's profligate lifestyle.

In addition to training servants in the performing arts, owning a family theatrical troupe had also become fashionable. In his memoir, Zhang Dai praised the notorious playwright Ruan Dacheng who owned and trained possibly the best and the most sophisticated family troupe in the late Ming era. Zhang described his experience of watching a perfect performance given by Ruan's troupe performed in Ruan's own house.⁶² Yuan Zhongdao attended a banquet organized by Zhang Lu at Feng Bao's old mansion. Zhang arranged a theatrical performance with

performers previously in Gu Li's and Yuan's family troupes. Despite their old age, the performers still performed.⁶³ Yuan further records that Li Taihe asked Min Fanli of Jiangling to search for a famous theatrical troupe to perform. Min finally found the troupe that originally belonged to Shen Zhou to perform *Wu Song Yixia ji*. Yuan praised the exquisite skills in speech, manner, and singing of the performer who played Wu Song's elder brother Wu Dalang.⁶⁴

Some families even perpetuated the tradition of owning family troupes. For example, Zhang Dai's family, since his grandfather's time in the Wanli era, had owned six different family troupes. Zhang lamented that by the time he turned fifty, the famous performers in his several family troupes were either dead or old like himself.⁶⁵ Immersed in the environment of excellent performers, Zhang acquired a sophisticated connoisseurship that few could match. Zhang thus made many friends with the famous theatrical professionals including Zhu Chusheng, Peng Tianxi, and Chen Suzhi who all participated in his famous elegant gatherings on his theatrical boat *The Untied Garden*.

CONFLICTING VIEWS ON THEATER

Despite the theatrical fervor, theater patronage likewise had negative implications for the literati. The moral problem of the theater was that it could be seen as a small waste of time and talent as shown in Yan Xiuqing's note on Zhu Yuming (1460–1526) in *Wujun erke zhi*. The eccentric calligrapher and poet Zhu Yunming was notorious for his indulgence in wine, women, gambling, and, of course, theater. When he was young, he constantly participated in *zaju* performances. Min sees this indulgence as a waste of his talent.⁶⁶ The moral problems of theater, likewise, could have significant implications in political feuds. For example, theater was used as a tool in the notorious feuds between the Fushe (Restoration Society) and the Chief Grand Secretary Wen Tiren's family in the Chongzhen reign. As its popularity grew, more literati and government officials joined the Fushe. In 1633 when the Fushe had its national convention at Suzhou's Tiger Hill, Prime Minister Wen's younger brother Yuren wanted to join the Fushe to smooth away their conflicts. Fushe leader Zhang Pu disliked the immoral minister, and refused to grant Wen membership. Yuren thus hired a playwright to write the play *The Green Peony* to critique and satirize the Fushe. The play was staged all over Zhejiang, which offended Fushe members. Fushe leaders Zhang Pu and Zhang Cai travelled to Zhejiang and asked the Assistant School Commissioner Li Yuankuan to intervene on the Fushe's behalf. Li thus confiscated and burnt all printed copies of the

play, and imprisoned Wen Yuren's servants. The conflicts between the Fushe and the Wens deepened.⁶⁷ The Grand Secretary thus drummed up cases against the Fushe, and petitioned Emperor Chongzhen to prevent its members from passing the examinations and receiving official appointments. Wen listed the inclusion of prostitutes, theatrical performers, and servants on the membership rolls as one of the Fushe's crimes.⁶⁸ In this conflict, Wen's party utilized the popularity of theater to slander his enemy, and then assigned his enemy the crime of housing theatrical professionals. Theater became a vehicle for factional strife.

Theater thus formed a conflicted relationship with the literati. The literati immersed themselves in theatrical culture to create their leisurely lifestyle, but theater had negative connotations. In his diary, for example, Ye Sheng cautions explicitly that staging stories of famous and virtuous officials as entertainment and as accompaniment for wine disgraces and slanders these worthies. Ye proposes that it is misguided to see theater as a didactic tool and wrong to promote it.⁶⁹ Likewise, instead of embracing the aesthetic enjoyments theater provided, Gu Qiyuan perceived the fashion of family troupes as a sign of moral corruption. In *Kezuo zhiyu* Gu praises Jinling in the eras before the Zhengde and Jiajing reigns as virtuous based on the facts that gentry rarely kept private performers in keeping with their morality.⁷⁰ The Zhengde and Jiajing reigns were perceived as the turning point when theater became a sign of moral corruption. Ironically, enthusiasm towards theater and theatrical troupes define both the good and the evil eras.

The idea of the simultaneously good and evil theater is best illustrated in the law proposed by Cao Run, a member of the Board of Justice:

From now on, only plays about deities, righteous men, virtuous women, filial sons, and obedient grandsons that inspire virtues in people and show happiness and peace were not prohibited. Anyone who collects, recites, prints, and sells plays that violate the sages' words and blaspheme the emperors will be prosecuted, and plays will be burnt within five days. Those who dare to hide them will be decapitated along with his whole family.⁷¹

This law shows that theater bears both positive inspiring and negative corrupting powers, which required strict regulations. Such law, be it realized or not, shows how much the scholar officials were conflicted about the power of the theater.

THEATRICAL EXTRAVAGANZAS IN MING SOCIETY

The spectacular scene of watching theatrical performances described by Fan Lian in *Yunjian jumu chao* gives a picture of the prevalent popularity of theater among the commoners, and the extravagant lengths that people went to in staging plays:

After the pirates' pillaging, each year in villages and towns there would be idolatrous processions in the second and third months. The local young thugs and dilettantes always gather masses and stage the *zaju*. . . In the counties, the scholars and commoners all bring their families to watch the shows. The touring and transportation boats crowd the rivers. The whole nation seemed to have gone wild. The performances lasted four or five days in each town. ⁷²

Fan records another theatrical extravaganza featuring three or more plays (*Guafu zhengsi* and *Herong ji* seem to be two of the plays) and even real horses:

In 1590, each town hired two or three hundred horses, and all performers wore bright colored official robes and leather boots. They wore official hats, gold pearls, and green flowers. The scene was reminiscent of the First Degree Winner's triumphant parade. Three pearl crops, worth more than one hundred taels, were used. They recruited thirty or forty prostitutes to dress up as those west-conquering widows and to play Zhaojun who journeys beyond the borders . . . ⁷³

The real horses suggest that the organizers of these performances intended to introduce a realism into theater. According to Fan, these performances took place outdoors, and "in order to protect them from rain all streets and bridges were covered with tarpaulin."⁷⁴ The tarpaulin, perhaps, also transformed the outdoor streets into stages in which props like real horses could be easily introduced.

Zhang Dai also notes the use of real horses in a performance. In order to enhance further the sense of realism, the looks of the actors must resemble the *dramatis personae*:

The locals celebrated the festival of Deity Yang's Temple with *dramatis personae* assumed by courtesans,⁷⁵ who merely stood in costumes ten years ago. Since they hosted the festival, the Luo brothers planned it with thought and literary flair. They staged the *Outlaws of the Marsh* with twenty or thirty horses, and customary annual *chuanqi* plays. Each of the three-day festivals would stage a different play. The performers must resemble the *dramatis personae*. Before the show, when one resembles a certain character, a performer must absolutely convince everybody before s/he was hired. After the show, if a performer acted as Hu Lian, then everyone called him Hu Lian to the extent that all forgot his real surname. Once the performers were set, then they would discuss how they would stage the plays with complete devotion. If a character requires a costume of certain colors, silk, and decorative patterns, they would spend tens of gold coins for merely a bolt of cloth. Helmet and shoes alone would show the spirit of the *dramatis personae*. Various friends of mine adept in acting arrived a month ago. They devoted all their efforts to preparing for the selection of performers. After they attired, they would rehearse

first. Only when everybody praised their acting, then they would be hired. Thus, the thought and literary flair that went into each performer and each horse, just like the lines of antiques and famous paintings, were meticulously done.⁷⁶

The effort, money, labor, and thought put into these attempts to transform streets into stages or to introduce a sense of realism demonstrate the commoners' zeal for theater in Ming society as well as the elites' ability to sponsor such spectacles.

THEATER AND TEMPLE FESTIVITIES

The best opportunities for commoners to enjoy theatrical performances were temple festivals. Zhu Guozheng, for example, mentions just such a performance at the birthday celebration of the deity worshiped in the Temple of Lord Wei.⁷⁷ Observing the temple festivals of Suzhou, Xu Fuzuo also notes that theatrical performances were present on the routes while the deities' statues paraded through town. The performers also costumed as various *dramatis personae* to accompany the marching statues.⁷⁸ These customs continue in temple fairs across Chinese communities in Asia to this day. Zhang Dai likewise records several theatrical extravaganzas in temple festivals. For example, Zhang notes that Tiantai was famous for its varied and rare species of peonies and particularly the Temple of Five Saints cultivated a species of yellow peonies with unusually big blossoms. The locals would have four or five theatrical performances during the full bloom.⁷⁹ These temple festivals frequently feature multiple theatrical performances simultaneously. The four or five stages at the Temple of Five Saints, comparatively speaking, were relatively modest. In his pilgrimage to Mt. Tai, Zhang saw a hostel where the pilgrims staged more than twenty theatrical performances.⁸⁰

Witnessing many theatrical extravaganzas in temple festivals, Zhang Dai naturally associated theater with temples. When visiting the Temple of Jinshan at Beigu on the night of Oct. 2, 1629, he and his friends thus spontaneously staged a night performance:

It was past eleven at night when our boat arrived at the Temple of Jinshan. We passed the Dragon King Hall and entered the Great Hall. All was silent. The moonlight penetrated the woods, and looked like remnants of snow. I asked a young servant for the props and lights. We performed "Han Shizhong's Battle at Jinshan," "Yangtze River," and other plays. The gongs and drums were so loud that they woke the temple's residents. An old monk rubbed his eyes with his hand, opened his mouth wide, and yawned, laughed, and cried simultaneously. He slowly fixed his eyes and tried to see who and why we were here, but he dared not ask. We finished the plays at dawn and untied our boat to cross the river. The monk gazed at us for a long time until our boat sailed all the way to the foot of the mountain, and wondered if we were humans, monsters, or ghosts.⁸¹

This anecdote conflates the literati and the commoners in their love of theater in the temple setting. Zhang and his friends were ready to give performances anywhere and anytime, while the monks of the temple allowed these naughty travelers to disturb the peaceful and quiet night with their loud performances. Theater at a temple seemed so natural that no temple resident took it as an offense that blasphemed the religious setting.

Lantern Festivals were also popular occasions for theatrical performances as attested by Zhang Dai:

At the night of the Lantern Festival, I gave my best to celebrate. My servants and maids were all good at drums and string instruments . . . Without theatrical performances, then the lanterns would not be intoxicated enough. Without dance and music, then the lanterns would not be bright enough. I had my young servants perform forty or fifty Yuan plays. After performing four plays, the dance troupe would dance, drum, and play music. . .⁸²

Indeed, without theatrical performances, the festivals would not be festive enough. Theatrical extravaganzas intoxicate the celebrations, incite the excitements, and brighten the festivities even to this day.

Theatrical extravaganzas consisting of multiple performances, however, required significant finances and resources, and easily led to extravagances as both organizers and troupes sought to outdo each other. According to Yuan Gun, this extravagance even occurred in occasions as solemn as funerals, which he deemed as undermining the integrity: “The head of the imperial weapon factory Cai Chenlu arranged an extravagant funeral by using silk for everything and hiring twelve actresses costumed as the twelve west-conquering widows to stage the famous play *The Yang’s Female Generals*.”⁸³

Yuan Gun further condemned the bad custom of hiring performers to act as mourning filial descendants and of adopting theatrical music at funerals. Theatrics undermined the funeral’s sad and solemn atmosphere.

Just as the theater became a problem for emperors and the literati, in excessiveness the festive performances became the source of commoners’ moral failures:

Those from Haiyan of Jiaxing, Yuyao of Shaoxing, Cixi of Ningbo, Huangyan of Taizhou, and Yongjia of Wenzhou who had learned acting were called the sons of drama. Even those from good families did not feel ashamed to learn the art. In Southern Theater, every play included female characters and every act featured tears to incite the sadness. This is the sound of a dying nation, like the Southern Song. Those who impersonated women were called “dan impersonators” whose manners

were almost real. Those literati officials wishing to dignify their households must reject this practice.⁸⁴

The chronicler Lu Rong understood theater's corrupting power, and recognized that by learning theatricals one would turn oneself into *dramatis personae* and thus become lost in the acting. The theatrical sounds and settings became the realities of the individual and the nation in their corrupted and degenerated states. He thus cautions people to stay away from the practice of theatrical arts.

CONCLUSION

Lu Rong's idea that theatrical arts conflate with reality is not unique to the late Ming era. Zhou Hui's anecdote in *Jinling suoji* embodies this conflation:

A noble of high status was illiterate and innocent. One day, he watched the play *Zheng Yuanhe* in a family banquet. Liu Zhun, the troupe's clown, was good at using humor to move his audience. While acting as the servant Lai Xingbao who was going to be sold, Liu cried and showed great attachment to the master. The noble summoned the actor to the banquet table, and rewarded him a full cup of wine. The noble consoled him that as your master was selling you, you need not attach to him. Liu answered yes and withdrew. This record keeper Zhou Hui comments: this is a play within a play, a dream within a dream, and this is how a noble became a noble.⁸⁵

This confusion about theater and reality recalls Du Renjie's peasant who is likewise confused. However, while in Du's story the peasant's confusion arises from the unfamiliarity with the theatrical arts, in Zhou's story the nobility's confusion was inspired by the excellent acting skill of the performer, a result of the popularity and pervasiveness of theater. Developed throughout the Ming dynasty, theater became the integral part of the daily life of the court, of the literati, and of the commoners.

The popularity of theater and the integration of people from different classes was also exhibited in the suddenly increased publications of illustrated plays and prints during and after the Wanli periods. The illustrations of printed plays feature stage settings, acting gestures (*shenduan*), and props became the popular reads for both literati and commoners who as Zhang Dai records compare performance to the printed texts. The color prints produced in Suzhu and Yangliuqing with themes and characters from dramas adorned the households of both the literati and commoners during the New Year celebrations. The theatrical arias were sung by theatrical professionals, amateur literati singers, and

servants on stages, at banquets, on boats, in gardens, at hostels, and in the courtesan quarters, etc. The popularity of theater, regardless whether it is virtuous or corruptive, certainly bridges and blurs the boundaries of social classes in the Ming world.

NOTES

- 1 Zhang Dai, *Tao'an mengyi* (Taibei: Hanjing Wenhua Shiye Gongsì, 1984), 4.50–51.
- 2 Tian Yiheng, *Liuqing Rizha* (Taibei: Guangwen shuju, 1969), 95.
- 3 Xu Wei, *Nanci xulu* (Taibei: Dingwen shuju, 1974), 240.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Du Mu, *Dugong tanzuan*, in Lu Cai, ed., Li Jianxiong, in vol. 5 of *Mingdai biji xiaoshuo daguan* (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2005), 2.576.
- 6 For a discussion of Zhu's plays, see Wilt L. Idema, *The Dramatic Oeuvre of Chu Yu-tun (1379–1439)* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985).
- 7 Huang Yu, *Shuanghui suichao*, in Zhou Guangpei, ed., *Lidai biji xiaoshuo jicheng: Mingdai biji xiaoshuo*, Vol. 23 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 1995), 3.281–282.
- 8 Shen Defu, *Wanli yehuo bian*, in *Yuan Ming biji shiliao congbian* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), 10.271–2.
- 9 Peng Shi, *Peng Wenxian Gong biji*, in vol. 15 of *Lidai biji xiaoshuo jicheng: Mingdai biji xiaoshuo*, 1.365.
- 10 Shen Defu, *Wanli yehuo bian*, 14.361.
- 11 Ibid., 1.15
- 12 Zhu Guozhen, *Yongchuang xiaopin*, ed., Wang Genlin, in vol. 14 of *Mingdai beji xiaoshuo daguan*, 10.3343–4.
- 13 Shen Defu, *Wanli yehuo bian*, 1.16–17.
- 14 Xie Zhaozhi, *Wuzazu*, in vols. 23 and 24 of *Lidai biji xiaoshuo jicheng: Mingdai biji xiaoshuo*, 3.211–12.
- 15 Ni Qian, *Chaoxian jishi*, in vol. 15 of *Lidai biji xiaoshuo jicheng: Mingdai biji xiaoshuo*, 422–3. See also Zhu Guozhen, *Yongchuang xiaopin*, 30.3814.
- 16 For records of performances in this book, see pages 424, 427, 429 of Ni Qian, *Chaoxian jishi*.
- 17 Li Qing, *Sanyuan biji*, in vol. 4 of *Lidai biji xiaoshuo jicheng: Mingdai biji xiaoshuo*, 447.
- 18 Ibid., 245.
- 19 Gu Yingtai, *Mingshi jishi benmo*, in vol. 6 of *Mingshi jishi benmo* (Shanghai: Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1937), 43.45. For a balanced appraisal of Zhengde and his activities within the broader context of Ming state and society, see David M. Robinson, *Bandits, Eunuchs, and the Son of Heaven: The Economy of Violence in Mid-Ming China* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2001).
- 20 Following in the same vein, Liu Ruoyu also uses theater to characterize another evil eunuch Wei Zhongxian. For the relevant part see Liu Ruoyu, *Recorded inside the Jail*, in vol. 22 of *Lidai biji xiaoshuo jicheng: Mingdai biji xiaoshuo*, 14.212, 14.221, 16.321–9.

- 21 Zang Xian made great contributions to the development of theater with his compiled anthology titled *The New Sounds of the Prosperous Age* (*Shengshi xinsheng*). See Ding Shumei and Wei Qiang, “Mingdai quanguai yu xiqu fazhang guanxi zhi tantao—yi Zang Xian he Guo Xun weili,” *Shanghai xiju xueyuan xuebao*, 3 (2015), 60–69.
- 22 Shen Defu, *Wanli yehuo bian*, 14.367 and 21.545.
- 23 Ibid., 21.545.
- 24 Ibid., 21.545.
- 25 Ibid., 27.700.
- 26 Ibid., 1.33.
- 27 Ibid., 21.546.
- 28 Ibid., 21.541.
- 29 Ibid., 1.33–34.
- 30 Ibid., 21.545.
- 31 Ibid., 1.34.
- 32 Liu Ruoyu, *Zhuozhong zhi*, Supplement 1.798–99.
- 33 Kong Shangren, *The Peach Blossom Fan*, trans., Chen Shih-hsiang and Harold Acton (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976).
- 34 Li Qing, *Sanyuan biji*, 440.
- 35 Xia Yunchun, *Xu Xinchun lu*, in vol. 12 of *Lidai biji xiaoshuo jicheng: Mingdai biji xiaoshuo*, 103.
- 36 Shen Defu, *Wanli yehuo bian*, 24.627.
- 37 Xu Fuzuo, *Huadang Ge congtao*, in vol. 11 of *Lidai biji xiaoshuo jicheng: Mingdai biji xiaoshuo*, 3.217.
- 38 Xu Ciyu, *Chashu*, in vol. 15 of *Lidai biji xiaoshuo jicheng: Mingdai biji xiaoshuo*, 357–58.
- 39 Yuan Zhongdao, *Youju shilu*, in vol. 12 of *Lidai biji xiaoshuo jicheng: Mingdai biji xiaoshuo*, 1.519.
- 40 Ibid., 386.
- 41 Ibid., 440.
- 42 Zhang Dai, *Tao'an mengyi*, 4.34.
- 43 Wang Shizhen, *Gu bu Gu*, in vol. 2 of *Lidai biji xiaoshuo jicheng: Mingdai biji xiaoshuo*, 177.
- 44 Xu Fuzuo, *Huadang Ge congtao*, 4.324–5.
- 45 Yuan Zhongdao, *Youju shilu*, 357.
- 46 Ibid., 359.
- 47 Ibid., 216.
- 48 Wang Qi, *Yupu zaji*, in vol. 1 of *Lidai biji xiaoshuo jicheng: Mingdai biji xiaoshuo*, 325.
- 49 Yuan Zhongdao, *Youju shilu*, 190.
- 50 Ibid., 232.
- 51 Ibid., 293.
- 52 Zhang Dai, *Tao'an mengyi*, 3.27.
- 53 Qian Xiyuan, *Xixia*, in vol. 20 of *Lidai biji xiaoshuo jicheng: Mingdai biji xiaoshuo*, 4.421–2.

- 54 Yuan Zhongdao, *Youju shilu*, 206.
- 55 Zhang Dai, *Tao'an mengyi*, 4.30.
- 56 Wang Qi, *Yupu zaji*, 5.324.
- 57 Shen Defu, *Guqu zayan*, 25.641. Available at: <http://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=487698&remap=gb> Chinese Text Project, accessed on 9/13/2017.
- 58 Yuan Zhongdao, *Youju shilu*, 334.
- 59 Zhou Hui, *Jinling suoshi*, in vol. 10 of *Lidai biji xiaoshuo jicheng: Mingdai biji xiaoshuo*, 3.404-5.
- 60 Also see Joseph Lam's chapter herein.
- 61 Zhang Dai, *Tao'an mengyi*, 4.39.
- 62 Zhang Dai, *Tao'an mengyi*, 8.73.
- 63 Yuan Zhongdao, *Youju shilu*, 386-7.
- 64 Ibid., 389.
- 65 Zhang Dai, *Tao'an mengyi*, 4.37.
- 66 Min Xiuqing, *Wujun erke zhi*, in vol. 21 of *Lidai biji xiaoshuo jicheng: Mingdai biji xiaoshuo*, 1.387-90. This anecdote is also included in Xu Fuzuo, *Huadang Ge cong'an*, 3.202-3.
- 67 Lu Shiyi, *Fushe jilue*, in vol. 12 of *Lidai biji xiaoshuo jicheng: Mingdai biji xiaoshuo*, 522-523.
- 68 Ibid., 562.
- 69 Ye Sheng, *Shuidong riji*, in vol. 19 of *Lidai biji xiaoshuo jicheng: Mingdai biji xiaoshuo*, 5.254-255.
- 70 Gu Qiyuan, *Kezuo zhiyu*, in vol. 10 of *Mingdai biji xiaoshuo daguan*, 1.1212.
- 71 Gu Qiyuan, *Kezuo zhiyu*, 10.1463.
- 72 Fan Lian, *Yunjian jumu chao*, in vol. 5 of *Biji xiaoshuo daguan*, series 22 (Taipei: Xinxing shuju, 1976), 2635-6.
- 73 Fan Lian, *Yunjian jumu chao*, 13:2.6b.
- 74 Ibid., 13:2.6b.
- 75 The term Zhang Dai uses here is "ying taiga" which is defined as "summoning courtesans to perform *zaju* at the temple festivals and funerals" which has been a custom in Taiwan. Tang Zangun, *Taiyang ji*, in *Taiwan guanxi wenxian jiling* (Taipei: Taiwan Yinhang, 1972), 173.
- 76 Zhang Dai, *Tao'an mengyi*, 4.32.
- 77 Zhu Guozhen, *Yongchuang xiaopin*, 19.3552.
- 78 Xu Fuzuo, *Huadang Ge cong'an*, 7.495.
- 79 Zhang Dai, *Tao'an mengyi*, 1.2.
- 80 Ibid., 4.39-40.
- 81 Ibid., 1.4.
- 82 Ibid., 4.36-7.
- 83 Yuan Gun, *Shiwei*, in vol. 12 of *Lidai biji xiaoshuo jicheng: Mingdai biji xiaoshuo*, 2.135.
- 84 Lu Rong, *Shuyuan zaji*, in vol. 13 of *Lidai biji xiaoshuo jicheng: Mingdai biji xiaoshuo*, 109-110.
- 85 Zhou Hui, *Jinling suoshi*, 4.495-6.

PART III

IDENTITIES



As the last native ruling house sandwiched between the “alien” conquest dynasties of the Mongol Yuan and the Manchu Qing, the Ming has always held a special place in the annals of imperial Chinese history. The founder was explicit in championing the return of Han Chinese rule to the Middle Kingdom (or Central Dominion in Leo Shin’s rendering) and though his successors likewise often made explicit distinctions between Han and non-Han, they all also recognized the reality that the Ming, like all imperial dynasties in China, was a multi-ethnic empire. I do not make this point to support a political agenda regarding contemporary China, but rather as a simple statement of fact. So while the Ming certainly did not explicitly embrace this fact the way that the dynasties before and after it did, they still built upon earlier traditions of multi-ethnic rule and extended the influence of “Chinese” culture while adopting a fair deal from these other peoples and cultures. With respect to the Mongols in particular, David Robinson has convincingly shown how Mongol military culture influenced the Ming court and its emphasis upon “martial spectacles” to underscore the state’s military prowess.¹

Of course, important as it may have been, ethnicity was far from the only source of identity for Ming subjects. People identified themselves in

relationship to one another in family, social, and occupational settings. Others took on religious identities and affiliations. Some located identity within the classic Confucian texts, striving to realize the high ideals of the ancients. Still others may have seen loyalty to the state and ruling house themselves as the most salient symbols for identification. The state itself established an identity within and without the empire by virtue of symbols such as dragons, phoenixes, massive architecture, and blue and white pottery. Identities could overlap and change over time and there was always the question of interpretation and audience. In Part III of the book we explore the implications of some of these forms of identity.

In chapter ten Leo Shin grapples with the thorny issue of the “Han-ness” of Ming China. As noted above, he begins by noting the prevalence of interpretations emphasizing the distinctively Han or Chinese characteristics of the Ming, while also highlighting how recent historiography in China and elsewhere has contrasted the Ming with “foreign” dynasties such as the Yuan and the Qing. Yet he interestingly finds relatively few explicit references to Han people in Ming legal codes, though there seems to have been an implicit sense that non-Han subjects were more likely to cause trouble as well as a notion that Han identity was somewhat self-evident. Furthermore, the term is also barely found in the extensive *Veritable Records* of the Ming. Again, it mostly occurs in respect to those who were threats to the state, most often of non-Han origins, suggesting that the imagined norm was the Han.

As Shin has discussed amply elsewhere, throughout the Ming the state was steadily expanding its frontiers and the scope of its formal control and influence, particularly in the southwest.² This increasingly brought Han Chinese into contact with minority peoples, often in actual conflict. From the perspective of the state, this was an opportunity to spread culture and civilization, as well as perhaps expand the tax base. But they also sometimes feared that “spies” amongst the non-Han groups could acquire the trappings of Han identity such as clothing and hairstyles and thereby undermine the empire and its policies from within. Yet in other sources (not discussed by Shin herein), there is a paternalistic sentiment towards the needs of the non-Han as well as an awareness of cultural and ethnic differences between various non-Han groups. And significantly, after the fall of the Ming, many of the non-Han groups of the southwest, as discussed in Swope’s chapter on Li Dingguo, chose to cast their lot with the Ming rather than the Manchus. This may reflect a sentiment of “better the devil you know,” but it also says something about the multi-ethnic character of the Ming even within a framework that consistently stressed the centrality of Han identity and culture. Thus, Shin finds that there was an “imagined community” of Han Chinese in the Ming whose members were believed to be inherently

related to one another.

The significance of such conclusions is connected, as Shin notes, to contemporary debates about the Chinese nation and its multi-ethnic character. This has allowed, or even encouraged, certain groups to make claims about the inclusiveness of the various Chinese empires across history, resulting in a rather a-historical teleology. It is useful, as Shin shows, to attempt to discern how people in the Ming (or any era) used and understood such terms as *Han* and *Hua*. For these were clearly markers of identity, but their meaning was somewhat different than is generally assumed. That being said, Shin makes an interesting argument for considering the Ming imperial enterprise as central to the creation of a Han identity that has become synonymous with “Chineseness” via a series of historical contingencies.

Moving into the realm of material culture, the most striking surviving examples of Ming identity are undoubtedly architectural. The Forbidden City, the Great Wall, and the Temple of Heaven are all (originally) Ming dynasty constructions that have come to symbolize the power and glory of the dynasty among other things. They are often represented as being quintessentially Chinese, yet similar constructions with similar connotations can be found in neighboring states such as Korea and Vietnam. In chapter eleven Aurelia Campbell examines the Hall of Supreme Harmony in the Forbidden City, which, ironically, she finds is a mere simulacrum of the original created under the audacious Emperor Yongle as the centerpiece of his new residence in his new (old) capital. As in so many other projects of the early Ming rulers the standards established in the initial creation of the building proved impossible for later rulers and architects to fully emulate.

Campbell’s detailed recounting of the construction and reconstruction of this particular structure provides much valuable information about the care put into creating monumental symbols of imperial authority. As in Sally Church’s essay about the Longjiang shipyards above, one gains an appreciation of the size and scope of the imperial bureaucracy and the resources of the empire as well as the problems stemming from resource shortages such as *nanmu*. Another often neglected aspect of such projects are their human costs. Campbell notes how these massive imperial building projects, which often required rare woods and other materials from distant parts of the empire that had to be submitted by minority peoples as tribute tax, could lead to unrest that necessitated military action on the part of the state. Indeed, the rebellion of Yang Yinglong in the 1580s–90s has been specifically linked to imperial construction projects associated with rebuilding parts of the Forbidden City.³

The importance of maintaining appearances by retaining proportions even if actual scale changed offers insight into the sanctity of imperial precedents. So does the method of using inferior grade woods attached to inner cores to simulate more expensive materials. The state authorities were well aware of the symbolic importance of materials and the image they projected of the state. But the reality of research shortages and/or difficulties in procurement meant that clever alternatives needed to be devised. But since “preserving architectural continuity with the past” was paramount, successive rulers found ways to compromise by retaining the basic form and symbolism, even if size and materials varied. What is interesting in this respect is Campbell’s observation of just how vague references to “the former system” could be. The goal was to retain the appearance of stability and majesty and convey a sense of awe-inspiring timelessness in imperial constructions. The specific details of how this was accomplished could vary.

Finally, the significance of retaining old forms and methods as transmitted in written records mirrors Sally Church’s discussion of the activities of the Longjiang shipyard. The Kangxi reconstruction of the Hall of Supreme Harmony was apparently derived from late Ming versions of it. So even between dynasties there was an interest in retaining the “authentic power” of the original hall, which indicates the connection between architecture and imperial identity in China.

Turning from the grand to the specific, Ying Zhang examines Confucian friendship in chapter twelve. Relations between friends were one of the five cardinal relationships in traditional Confucianism. As literati were ideally supposed to embody core Confucian values and set examples for those beneath them in China’s social hierarchy, it is fascinating to see this principle in practice. At the core of Zhang’s study is a circle of friends who found themselves afoul of the powerful eunuch Wei Zhongxian and his allies in the 1620s in one of the factional battles referenced by Thomas Nimick in chapter one and Yang Wei in chapter five.

Fittingly enough, the two key figures discussed here, Zhu Zuwen and Zhou Shunchang, became friends out of a shared commitment to filial piety, another cardinal Confucian virtue. The course of their friendship as recorded by Zhu in his travel diary offers additional insight into the parameters of literati identity in the late Ming as Zhu continually expresses concerns about status and outward appearances. The two friends also located their self worth in their status as “loyal officials,” at least from their perspective of resisting the alleged machinations of the eunuch and his cronies. And in their willingness to risk punishment including death, these friends embodied the highest aspects of idealized

Confucian friendship. Moreover, as Zhu's commitment to Zhou demonstrates, one's obligations as a true friend could transcend death in the form of performing proper rituals.

We have already mentioned the proliferation of writing forms and audiences in the Ming. Zhang's study provides details on another prominent form, that of autobiography, specifically what has been described as "spiritual autobiography." As she notes, Zhu represented an average man of his class in the Ming. While he did not have significant intellectual or philosophical insights, he was thoroughly grounded in the Confucian tradition and he chose to reflect on his spiritual growth in Confucian terms, even if his worldview was more varied. One can further argue that this form of self-identification was certainly gauged towards public consumption later. Even if one could not be a prominent thinker or public official, their descendants could hold them up as exemplars and their name would be remembered positively for posterity. In the case of those martyred Donglin adherents and sympathizers this is certainly what happened. They lost the immediate factional battle, but they won the historiographic war.

Also interesting within the context of literati identity politics is the way that Zhu's diary and other communications were circulated amongst friends and fellow literati in efforts to convey both the complete record and, more importantly, the proper sentiments of friendship. It was important not to offer the appearance of impropriety while also highlighting the positive contributions of all involved. And one needed to imbue the works with the proper Confucian tone, or spin. This was because it was considered the historian's job to provide moral lessons and highlight the spiritual growth of protagonists. In her analysis Zhang does an excellent job of emphasizing the distinctively Confucian traits of friendship extolled and embodied by her subjects.

Chinese society, particularly in the southeast, is often identified with lineages. Ivy Maria Lim provides a case study of one such lineage group in chapter thirteen. Similar to other chapters throughout this book, one of her key findings is how the spread of literacy in the Ming "resulted in a downward percolation of literati symbols and cultural norms that propagated ideals and standards among the common people" of how one might propagate one's status. In other words, there was an expansion of interest in creating genealogies and in using lineages as a basis for socio-familial organization. This in turn resulted in the creation of not only written genealogies, but also ancestral halls, effectively extending certain symbols of elite identity to the masses. Significantly, Lim also connects these developments to the increasing commercialization of the Lower Yangzi delta in particular, once again

revealing a heretofore little discussed dimension of the Ming's engagement with broader global trends and processes.

More specifically, Lim connects these transformations to the *wokou* crisis of the mid-sixteenth century, also discussed by Roland Higgins above. Lineage organization became a local survival strategy to avoid falling into the negative classifications of local groups emanating in part from the factionalized political atmosphere of the court. This offers a fine example of how identities could be fluidly tied to court initiatives as well as local realities. Lim's discussion of the convoluted relationship between lineage formation and the *lijia* system of taxation and local defense illustrates this point further. From the perspective of the state, it wanted loyal, exploitable subjects. The subjects, on the other hand, sought to be identified more as literati, with all their attendant perquisites and exemptions. Lineages offered a convenient way to fashion these new identities while the thriving labor market allowed for those who might seem to have fallen through the system to still support themselves or even prosper in the case of military mercenaries.

Returning to the significance of the mingling of class and status in the Ming, Lim's conclusion that the "mere possession of a genealogy was effectively an assertion of literati status" is a fascinating point worth discussing in comparative fashion. Just as merchants in Europe were appropriating the trappings of the elite in their societies, ambitious Ming subjects were doing the same. Of course the same was true in contemporary Japan, experiencing its era of *gekokujo* in the sixteenth century. Indeed, the fabrication of illustrious ancestors in southeast China is strikingly similar to what one sees in the Japanese case. What is also interesting in this case is how simple assertion of literati ancestry could be sufficient to establish one's dynastic loyalty and proper status as a good subject. In the end, both sides got what they wanted. The lineages gained a measure of protection and legitimation. The state gained a better sense of local society and some measure of control by virtue of incorporating lineage groups into state administrative structures.

Whereas Kenneth Hall discusses the roles played by Chinese merchants in diasporic communities in Southeast Asia later in this volume, in chapter fourteen Xing Hang examines how certain elements of the Chinese diaspora continued to identify with the Ming even after its fall in 1644. His research demonstrates yet another fruitful avenue for exploration of identity in the Ming world as he relies upon tomb carvings, steles, plaques, and inscriptions on a variety of items to trace how overseas Chinese dated epigraphs. While he finds that in fact they used diverse methods of dating, what was most striking in the present

context was the repeated use of the term “Longfei” (Soaring Dragon), which signified loyalty to the recently fallen dynasty but did so in an oblique way that neither explicitly countered the newly established Qing (since it was not a recognized Ming reign title) nor offended local authorities who had both their own rulers and, in some cases, were part of the Qing tributary order and therefore technically subordinate to the newly ascendant Qing monarchs. In the process he uses these epigraphs as a window towards a broader understanding of the impact of the Ming-Qing dynastic transition upon overseas Chinese populations across maritime East and Southeast Asia.

Hang illuminates some of the ways that Han Chinese in particular struggled to preserve their ethnic identity in the face of conquest by a foreign group. Using the Longfei moniker became a means of asserting one’s opposition to Manchu rule, especially when it became obvious that the Ming loyalist elements in China proper were failing in their efforts to defeat the Qing conquerors. The loyalist situation was exacerbated by the existence of multiple, often squabbling contenders, hence the adoption of the term Longfei to indicate association with the Ming, if not identification with a specific regime.⁴ The term fell out of use, however, within about a century as Qing rule became a recognized reality and the need for regularized trade with the regional hegemon superseded political loyalties, though forms of anti-Manchu sentiment, not unlike in Korea, continued to exist beneath the surface. Such conclusions are in accord with Leo Shin’s observations at the start of this section of the book pertaining to the creation of a more Han identity in conjunction with the rise of the Ming.

This can be seen in the widespread adoption of the Ming claimant Yongli’s (see Swope’s chapter on Li Dingguo) calendar and reign name amongst Chinese diasporic communities across maritime East and Southeast Asia. Hang contends that such groups were a “unified political bloc with a coherent proto-nationalist identity centered around the affirmation of Han Chinese ethnic sentiments and rejection of Manchu rule.” These groups in turn could look to the military clout of the Zheng organization on Taiwan for inspiration.⁵ However, once both Yongli and Zheng Chengong were dead, loyalty to the Ming became a thornier issue because there was neither a legitimate Ming heir nor a military strongman to throw one’s allegiance behind. The resultant pressure from the Qing upon the states that had aided and abetted Ming loyalists to varying degrees, such as Vietnam, forced the surviving loyalists to be more circumspect in their political leanings, hence the use of the Longfei dating convention, which continued to be used until the early nineteenth century in some cases. Additionally it seems that symbols of Han identity such as dress and hairstyles became symbols of

Ming loyalism, and, by extension, manifestations of Confucian virtues of loyalty, filial piety and righteousness. In this sense we can say that identity in and of the Ming had come full circle and Zhu Yuanzhang's dream of restoring Han primacy as central to "Chinese" identity was realized.

NOTES

- 1 See Robinson, *Martial Spectacles of the Ming Court* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2013).
- 2 See Leo K. Shin, *The Making of the Chinese State: Ethnicity and Expansion on the Ming Borderlands* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
- 3 In addition to the chapter cited by Campbell, see Kenneth M. Swope, "Civil-Military Coordination in the Bozhou Campaign of the Wanli Era," *War and Society* 18.2 (Oct., 2000), 49–70.
- 4 On the proliferation of Ming loyalist courts and their rivalries, see Lynn Struve, *The Southern Ming, 1644–1662* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984); and Swope, *On the Trail of the Yellow Tiger: War, Trauma and Social Dislocation in Southwest China During the Mong-Qing transition* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2018).
- 5 For a somewhat dated examination of the relationship between Zheng Chenggong (Koxinga) and Chinese nationalism, see Ralph C. Crozier, *Koxinga and Chinese Nationalism: History, Myth, and the Hero* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977). Also see Andrade, *Lost Colony: The Untold Story of China's First Great Victory Over the West* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), and Xing Hang, *Conflict and Commerce in Maritime East Asia: The Zheng Family and the Shaping of the Modern World, c. 1620–1720* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

CHAPTER 10

THE HAN-NESS OF MING CHINA



Leo K. Shin

INTRODUCTION¹

In a proclamation issued just shortly before the launch of a crucial northern expedition, Zhu Yuanzhang (1328–98), the future founder of the Ming dynasty, sought to assure the already-distraught population in the North China plain that he was a reluctant warrior, a commoner-turned-rebel whose goals were simply to “expel the *hu* and the *lu*” and to “avenge the humiliation that had been thrust upon the Central Dominion [*Zhongguo*].” According to Zhu Yuanzhang and his advisors, it was the Mandate of Heaven that the subjects of the Central Dominion (*Zhongguo zhi min*) be ruled not by the *yi* and the *di* but by the people of the Central Dominion (*Zhongguo zhi ren*). Mindful that there were still a large number of Mongols, Semu (that is, Western and Central Asians), and people “not of the Hua-Xia stock” active in the North China plain, the soon-to-be emperor promised that those who were willing to become subjects or serve as ministers of the new dynasty would be treated as if they were “people of Zhong-Xia.”²

In a similar vein, in a 1374 edict directed to the kingdom of Dali (in the present-day province of Yunnan in southwest China), Zhu

Yuanzhang, now the Hongwu emperor (r. 1368–98), sought to assure the ruler of Dali that it would be wise for the kingdom to resume its tributary relations with the Central Dominion. During the closing years of the Mongol Yuan dynasty, the Ming founder observed, there had indeed been “an absence of lordship over both the *Hua* and the *yi*.” But now that the Ming had “recovered the native land of our Han people” (*fu wo Han ren gu guo*) and “unified Zhong-Xia,” it was time for Dali to follow the examples of other *yi* to submit tribute to the centralizing state.³

The Ming emperor and his advisors were of course not the first to employ such an array of identifications (Zhongguo, Hua-Xia, Zhong-Xia, Hua, Han, etc.) to refer to what one now usually understands to be “China” or “Chinese.” Nevertheless, there are at least two reasons for us to reconsider the use of such identifications in general and the “Han-ness” of Ming China in particular. First, while they might disagree over details, many scholars have continued to subscribe to the view that China is—and has been since at least the Qin dynasty more than two millennia ago—a “multi-national” or “multi-ethnic” state (*duo minzu guojia*). For instance, in the general preface to the *Dynastic Histories of the Nationalities of China* (*Zhongguo li dai minzu shi*), an eight-volume series produced in 1996 by a team of scholars from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the Central University for Nationalities (now known as the Minzu University of China), it is explicitly noted that “the history of China is the history of multiple nationalities” (*duo minzu de lishi*). As various *minzu* (of which the Hua-Xia would emerge as the dominant one) came into increased contact with one another during the Xia, Shang, and Zhou periods, according to the editors of the series, they also began to develop closer and closer ties with one another. As a result, “since the times of the Qin and Han dynasties, a strong and unified multi-national state would emerge to tower over the world’s Orient.” As for the Ming dynasty, according to the editors, two developments are especially noteworthy: first, the Ming was “the last feudal dynasty established and ruled by China’s core nationality [*zhuti minzu*], the Han”; second, notwithstanding the developments in the Qing dynasty, it was during the Ming that the foundation of the “ethnic configuration” (*minzu geju*) of “early modern” China was laid. Though one may be tempted to dismiss such claims as motivated primarily by nationalistic sentiments or political considerations, the arguments and evidence presented by such scholars still deserve serious consideration.⁴

But—and this is the second reason to reconsider the “Han-ness” of Ming China—scholars from the Chinese-speaking world are not alone in making claims about the ethnic characteristics of the Ming dynasty. For example, in his introduction to Volume 7 of *The Cambridge History of*

China, the late Frederick Mote observed that the Ming period

is the only segment of later imperial history from the fall of the Northern Sung capital to the Jurchen invaders in 1126 until the Revolution of 1911 ended the imperial era during which all of China proper was ruled by a native or Han Chinese dynasty.

According to Mote, a trend of great importance in the Ming period was “the expansion of the Chinese population throughout the border provinces of the south and southwest” and the subsequent “displacement or absorption of non-Han minorities.” However, it is worth noting that in *Imperial China, 900–1800*, his *magnum opus*, Mote would choose to refer to “non-Chinese people” instead of “non-Han minorities.” The latter interpretation fits the more recent realization that the Ming state was in fact engaged in imperialist expansion in the southwest as discussed elsewhere in this volume.

Similarly, in his authoritative study of the governing vision of the Ming founding emperor, Edward Farmer suggests that, in the context of late imperial China, distinctions should be made between the Yuan and Qing dynasties, on the one hand, and the Ming period, on the other. In his view, whereas the former were “imperial” or “imperialistic” in their configurations, “[t]he Ming dynasty embodied a conscious effort to recreate an ethnic community of Han people who would be true to the core principles of the Chinese great tradition.”⁵

Neither, of course, are historians of the period alone in making claims about the Han-ness of Ming China. For instance, in their introduction to the volume *Empire at the Margins*, Pamela Crossley, Helen Siu, and Donald Sutton offer this comparison between the Ming and the Qing dynasties:

The Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1636–1912) empires were profoundly different with respect to their perceived structure of national and ethnic populations. In the Ming period, a national group within the empire happened to be very clearly defined—usually by culture, but in some instances by genealogy. The Qing structure was quite different, particularly before the nineteenth century. In that case, a distinctive form of rulership bound a group of historically defined populations of northern and eastern Asia into a consolidated conquest elite, and vigorously nurtured a theoretical distinction between them and the objects of the conquest.⁶

Even though they choose not to explicitly identify the “national group,” Crossley and company seem to agree that, during the Ming, such a population—whether it should be referred to as “Han” or otherwise—was “very clearly defined.” Such apparent certainties notwithstanding, given the weight the label *Han* has been made to shoulder, it is perhaps

useful to step back and re-examine how Ming rulers and scholar-officials (as it is difficult, if not impossible, to take into account the sentiments of the population in general) understood and deployed the identification. The objective here is not to minimize the importance of “Han” as a category; rather, the goal is to explain when, where, and to what extent Ming-dynasty China was “Han.”

WHO WERE THE HAN?

One way to gauge the “Han-ness” of the Ming dynasty is to examine how Ming rulers and officials went about sorting their subjects. As was the case for earlier dynasties, the primary objectives of the Ming ruling house—in the most blatant of terms—were to maintain control and to extract resources. As a result, from very early on, the Ming had opted to extend (but at the same time simplify) the Yuan-dynasty practice of classifying the population under its rule. Hence, there were commoners (for providing tax and corvee), military households (for supplying soldiers), and artisans (for furnishing the state with goods and tools). But though the Ming did classify its population by occupation, it did not follow the Yuan practice of formally categorizing its population into Mongols, Semu, Han, and Southerners. There was no need to. With the Mongols (along with their Western and Central Asian operatives) in retreat, and with the professed aim on the part of the Hongwu emperor to “chase away the *hu* and the *lu*” as well as to “recover the native land of our Han people,” it was apparently unnecessary, at least as a matter of principle, to recognize the Mongols or the Semu as constituents of the Ming. As a result, unlike in the case of the Yuan when the identification *Han ren* or *Nan ren* (“Southerners”) is routinely singled out in its legal writings, during the Ming dynasty, the label “Han people” appears only rarely in its legal codes and regulations.⁷

As it happened, *Han ren* is not mentioned at all in *The Great Ming Code* (*Da Ming lü*), “the basic law of the Ming dynasty” that was promulgated towards the end of the Hongwu reign. As far as the *Ming Code* is concerned, the only example of the use of identifications similar to those employed during the Yuan dynasty is found in an article concerning marriages:

Mongols and Semu people shall marry with people of the Central Dominion [*Zhongguo ren*]. (It is essential that both parties be willing.) They shall not marry among their own kind. Any violation shall be punished by eighty strokes of beating with the heavy stick, and both the man and the woman shall enter the government as slaves. In the case that people of the Central Dominion do not wish to marry the Huihui [Muslims] or the Qinchu [Kipchaks], the latter may marry among their own kind—[in such cases,] the above prohibition shall not be applied.⁸

The lack of references to “Han people” in the *Ming Code*—or in other earlier administrative or judicial orders, such as *The Great Ming Commandments* (*Da Ming ling*) or *The Imperial Grand Proclamations* (*Yu zhi da gao*)—does not mean that “Han-ness” was not an important organizing principle in the constitution of the Ming dynasty; it is, however, a useful reminder that *Han ren*, similar to *Zhongguo ren*, was one of a variety of identifications or categories Ming rulers and officials would mobilize for different purposes.

That said, let us consider a few examples when the label *Han ren* does appear in the regulations (*li*)—that is, case laws—that would come to be attached to the *Ming Code*. In one example, in a regulation dated to 1500, Han people, “regardless of whether they are from military or commoner households, and regardless of whether they have been issued certificates of ordination,” are explicitly barred from becoming monks or nuns of Tibetan Buddhism (*fan jiao*). Those who did so would be returned to their original place of registration, while “*Han ren* who passed themselves off as *fan ren*” would be banished to the military guards along the border. This is not the place to go into the details of the origins of this regulation. Suffice to say that though Ming-dynasty rulers, including the Hongwu and Yongle (r. 1403–24) emperors, are known to have cultivated a strong interest in *fan jiao* (the Zhengde emperor [r. 1506–21] “was so taken by Tibetan Buddhism that he gave himself the title of *Ta qing fa wang* [The dharma king of great auspiciousness] in 1510 and would sometimes don the regalia of a high Lama and give discourses on Buddhism,” according to historian Yü Chün-fang), Ming officials had from time to time expressed grave concerns about the large number of monks who had taken up residence in monasteries associated with what was still perceived as a foreign, if not barbaric, teaching.⁹

The second set of examples in which “Han people” are referenced in the regulations attached to the *Ming Code* has to do with troubles—whether real or perceived—in the borderlands. In another regulation dated to 1500, for example, it is stipulated that any *Han ren* who has been found to have colluded (*jiao jie*) with the *yi ren* (that is, “non-Chinese” indigenes) in Sichuan, Guangxi, Yunnan, Guizhou, Shaanxi, or other (border) regions and who has induced the *yi* people there to cause havoc will be punished by banishment. Similarly, in another regulation that aims to discourage litigations in the border regions, it is stipulated that Han people who have chosen to move into *yi* areas and who have, under false pretense, encouraged *yi* people to go beyond their local jurisdictions to file lawsuits should, again, be punished by banishment.¹⁰

The third set of examples has to do with the desire on the part of Ming rulers and officials to project a rational system of rewards and

punishments. In the *Ming Code*, it is not unusual to find regulations that stipulate the proper rewards or punishments for those involved in military campaigns. In one dated to 1556 that concerns the so-called Japanese (*wo*) pirates, for example, it is stipulated that any officer or soldier who can obtain and present the head of a “named, genuine *wo* bandit leader” would be entitled to an award of 150 taels of silver, anyone who can obtain and present the head of a “genuine *wo* bandit” would be entitled to 50 taels, while anyone who can capture and present the head of a “*Han ren* accomplice” would be entitled to 20 taels. Conversely, it is stipulated in another regulation for a different context that any officer or soldier who is found to have falsely presented the head of an innocent *Han ren* as that of a bandit would receive a demotion as a punishment. Based on the relatively terse entries in the *Ming Code*, it is not clear whether officials who formulated such policies were fully aware of the complex makeup of the “pirates” or “bandits” in question. It is evident, however, that with regard to law and order, especially in the context of border regions, the “Han-ness” of the people was a matter of consideration.¹¹

So even though *Han ren* was not, in the Ming dynasty, a category with a clearly defined legal status, it was from time to time invoked by Ming rulers and officials to underscore the need for control. Hence, “Han people”—unlike *fan* people—were prohibited from becoming monks or nuns of Tibetan Buddhism in part because unregulated expansion of monastic communities was perceived to be a drain to the government’s coffers; “Han people” were not to be mixed up in the affairs of the borderland *yi* people because such interactions could, among other consequences, upset the delicate balance of power in border regions; and while the severed head of a “*Han ren* accomplice” could earn a Ming officer or soldier twenty taels of silver, the presentation of that of a “genuine *wo* bandit leader” could result in a reward many times over, as eliminating the main (and perhaps most dangerous culprits) was deemed paramount. So while it is unclear from the *Ming Code* (and the attached regulations) who “Han people” were, it is apparent who they were not. In fact, during the Ming, the “Han” were often the default with whom all “Others” were compared and contrasted.

WHEN AND WHERE

So if “who were the Han?” might not be the most helpful question, examining when and where the label *Han* was summoned in the sources might be a more fruitful approach in gauging the Han-ness of Ming

China. Here I will move beyond the *Great Ming Code* as well as the *Collected Statutes* and make use instead of the *Veritable Records* (*Ming shilu*), which was compiled from the diaries of the imperial court and could thus be considered a proxy for the official points of view. Though there are obvious limitations to the *Ming shilu*, it does have the benefit of spanning much of the Ming period as well as including a wide range of imperial edicts, memorials, and other official documents. In part because the *Veritable Records* has been made available as a searchable electronic text, I will in what follows offer some comments in quantitative terms on the usage of Han-related labels therein. But my approach will remain primarily a qualitative one, and my discussion will rest on the close reading of selected examples found in the *Records*.¹²

Let us begin with *Han ren*. If one puts aside those examples when the label clearly refers to people from earlier dynasties, two general observations could be made about the uses of *Han* in the *Ming shilu*. First, between 1351 and 1628 (for the reason that the records of the Chongzhen reign [1628–44] was never officially compiled), there are altogether in the *Veritable Records* 83 references to *Han ren*—that is, on average, one reference for every three years. By contrast, a more generic label such as *min ding* (“adult subject”) would appear in the *Ming shilu* more than 250 times. One would of course need to be cautious in drawing any conclusion from such superficial statistics; after all, *Han ren* is just one among a range of compounds, among which are *Han yu* (Han language; 10 occurrences), *Han–Da* (Han and Mongols; 68), and *Han–tu* (or *tu–Han*, Han and indigenes; 165), in which *Han* appears in the *Veritable Records* as something akin to an ethnonym. Still, it would be fair to suggest that while *Han ren* does appear from time to time in the official records, it was only one among a number of identifications Ming rulers and officials chose to refer to their subjects.

The second observation has to do with the contexts in which *Han ren* appears in the *Veritable Records*. Below I will discuss some specific examples of when the label was deployed. But first consider Table 10.1:

Table 10.1 Characters before or after *Han ren* in the *Veritable Records*

Word	Character	Translation	Frequency
<i>ren</i>	人	people	30
<i>yi</i>	夷	yi people	18
<i>lu</i>	虜	lu people	16
<i>shang</i>	賞	to reward	13
<i>zei</i>	賊	bandits	13
<i>gui</i>	歸	to return	12
<i>cong</i>	從	to follow	12
<i>lu</i>	擄	to kidnap	12
<i>hui</i>	回	to come back	11
<i>bian</i>	邊	border	10
<i>fan</i>	番	fan people/foreign	10
<i>sheng</i>	陞	to promote	9
<i>gong</i>	功	merits	9
<i>shou</i>	首	heads	8
<i>ji</i>	級	heads	8
<i>lue</i>	掠	to loot	8
<i>song</i>	送	to send	7
<i>huo</i>	獲	to obtain	7
<i>guan</i>	官	officials	7
<i>bao</i>	報	to report	7

Here I have extracted all the relevant entries in which the label *Han ren* appears and made use of Antconc, a computer software for corpus analysis, to tabulate how often individual characters show up near the label. For this particular analysis, I have chosen to include only those that are no more than ten positions away from the label *Han ren*, and I have limited my listing to the 20 most commonly found characters (after having eliminated from the results those that serve primarily grammatical functions). The assumption is that, by examining the *immediate* contexts in which *Han ren* appears in the *Veritable Records*, one could better understand how the label was used during the Ming period.

So what could one learn from the information gathered? If one sets aside *ren* (“people,” which appears 30 times), *guan* (“officials,” 7 times), and words that are routinely found in imperial edicts and memorials (*cong*, “to follow” [12], and *bao*, “to report” [7]), the entries in [Table 10.1](#) could be grouped into three categories: labels for foreign, or “non-Chinese,” peoples (*yi* [18], *lu* [16], and *fan* [10]); terms associated with banditry and other forms of violence, especially in border areas (*zei*, [13], *lu* [12], *bian* [10], *lue* [8]), and words connected to government military actions (*shang* [13], *gui* [12], *hui* [11], *sheng* [9], *gong* [9], *shou* [8], *ji* [8], *song* [7], and *huo* [7]). The list in [Table 10.1](#) is no doubt far from exhaustive; there were other contexts in which the label *Han ren* was deployed that are not reflected by the words identified here. Yet, this relatively straightforward analysis does confirm the impression that, in

official records at least, there appears a strong correlation between the invocation of *Han ren* and references to actual or perceived threats posed to the Ming.

This is not to say that there was no substance associated with the label *Han*. In the *Veritable Records*, in addition to more abstract notions such as “Han territory” (*Han di*; 14 occurrences) and “Han rules” (*Han fa*; 17), there are also references to “Han family names” (*Han xing*; 3), “Han writings” (*Han wen*; 2), “Han dress” (*Han fu*; 1), etc. For Ming rulers and officials, not only was there a clear distinction between the way of life of the Han people and that of the *hu* and *lu* (“The *hu* and *lu* are dependent primarily on raising animals for their living, just as Han people are sustained by sowing and cultivating,” the Hongwu emperor once opined), there were also obvious differences between Han and non-Han peoples in terms of language (*yu yin*), physical features (*zhuang mao*), and dress (*yi mao*). Such perceived distinctions are seldom elaborated on in the *Ming shilu*, but from time to time such assumptions of differences could clearly be detected in reports about how certain *yi* people would impersonate (*mao*) Han people by adopting the latter’s way of dress or how certain Han people would pretend to be Tibetan monks to avoid various obligations to the state.¹³

Yet, it would be fair to say that, in general, the label *Han* is invoked in the *Veritable Records* less as a clearly defined population than as the imagined norm. This we can discern, for instance, from the periodic references in official sources to Han and Mongol (*Da*) officers and soldiers. As it is well known, despite the fact that the Ming dynasty was founded on the premise that the Mongol-led Yuan had to be overthrown, “tens of thousands” of Mongols stayed behind and joined the new regime. To take advantage of their perceived military prowess, Ming rulers had from very early on sought to resettle such Mongol households and integrate them into the Ming military system. In time, not only would such *Da* officers and soldiers (*Da guan/Da jun*) be sent to combat the “northern caitiffs” (that is, Mongols who continued to posed threats to the Ming), they would also be deployed to different parts of the Ming territory to undertake all sorts of government military actions. While it is difficult to gauge how much such *Da* households had over time been able to retain their language, customs, and overall “Mongol-ness,” in the *Ming shilu* at least, *Da* officers and soldiers would continue to be explicitly identified, while the compound *Han–Da* would often appear as a short-hand for *Han jun* and *Da jun*—the two primary constituents of the Ming military force.¹⁴

That “Han people” were the imagined norm can also be detected from a variety of references concerning borderland violence. Consider,

for instance, the following case involving the Uriyangkhad commandery of Taining (in present-day Jilin). The context here was that, over the course of the fifteenth century, the Ming court had come to rely on the Uriyangkhad commanderies in the northeast to serve as intermediaries or buffers between the Ming, the Mongols, and the Jurchens. Yet, though they were supposed to be allies of the Ming court, it was apparently not uncommon for the chiefs of the Uriyangkhad commanderies to lead attacks or raids against neighboring Ming settlements. But while others had opted to overlook such transgressions, in 1501, a number of officials including Qu Shen (js. 1487), whose job was to scrutinize the work of the Ministry of War, submitted a memorial criticizing the relatively lenient treatment of the offending chiefs. In particular, in response to a recommendation that the chiefs should be “rewarded” for returning those they had kidnapped, Qu and others argued:

It is the opinion of your ministers that it was the various *hu* of Taining who personally took steps to have the Han people seized. If we are to offer awards for sending back [those who were seized], it is as if the earlier act of violating the border was not a crime and the present act of returning the kidnapped is in fact one of merit. . .¹⁵

The key for us here of course is not whether or not it was a good policy for the Ming court to adopt a lenient approach towards the Uriyangkhad chiefs. Rather, it is the reference by Qu and others to the victims from the Ming settlements as *Han ren*. To be sure, very little is reported in this entry in the *Veritable Records* about who these Han people were. But precisely because of that, it is apparent that the identification *Han ren* is again used here to refer to the imagined norm.¹⁶

Consider also the case of the prefecture of Xuzhou in the present-day province of Sichuan in the southwest. Here the context was that even though parts of the prefecture had in previous dynasties been formally placed under the rule of native chieftains, during the early Ming period, they had been converted into regular administrative areas. The problem, however, was that because the regular officials who had been assigned to those areas “were neither fluent in the *yi* language nor familiar with the *yi* conditions,” there had taken place a cycle of repressions and rebellions—to the extent that, during the reign of the Jingtai emperor (1450–56), according to Zhou Hongmo (1420–92), a native of Xuzhou and at one point a vice minister at the Ministry of Rites, the *yi* “would have Han people captured, tie them to the trees, and randomly shoot at them.” For Zhou, there was but one solution to this plight: to restore the appointment of native chieftains so that, at the end, “the Han do not

cause troubles for the *yi*, and the *yi* do not harbor any ill will against the Han.” Just as in the case of Taining in the northeast discussed earlier when the label *Han ren* was a reference to the non-*lu* and non-*hu* natives who were residing in the Ming borderlands, in the case of Xuzhou the identification *Han ren* was apparently used to refer to the non-*yi* natives of the border regions in the southwest.¹⁷

Finally, it is worth noting as well that the label *Han ren* is often found in official records concerning the actual or imagined collusion between people from beyond the Ming realm and those from within. Consider for instance a memorial submitted by the Ministry of War in 1522. There, it is noted that a main source of the troubles associated with the northern *lu* has been the assistance rendered by borderland residents (*bianmin*) they had kidnapped or convicts who had chosen to flee to the *lu* territory. To rectify the situation, according to the Ministry of War, a two-pronged approach should be adopted. On the one hand, women, young children, or those who have not resided for long in the *lu* area and who would like to resettle in their original abode in the Ming territory should be provided with food, clothing, and other appropriate forms of assistance. On the other hand, people who have been away for an extended period and who have cultivated an intimate knowledge of the *lu* should be thoroughly vetted for their loyalty; those who proved to be trustworthy should be retained for service at the border and be given the task of “inducing our Han people” to return to the Ming territory. Similarly, in a memorial submitted by the Ministry of War in 1527, it is noted that, in carrying out their raids, the *lu* had relied heavily on *Han ren* as their guides. And it is again proposed that people who opted to return to the Ming fold be amply rewarded, especially if they were willing to serve as spies.¹⁸

HAN AND HUA

If Han people were the imagined norm, how should one understand the relationship between the identification *Han* and the equally ubiquitous *Hua*? A thorough analysis of the uses of the label *Hua* is obviously beyond our scope here, but a preliminary survey of its appearances in Ming-dynasty sources does allow us to offer some tentative observations. For historians of later imperial China, it should come as no surprise that the designation *Hua* (or, less commonly so, *Hua ren*) did figure prominently in official discourses. In particular, while the peoples of Hua and *yi*—or “Chinese” and “non-Chinese,” as they are sometimes rendered—are from time to time mentioned alongside each other in the *Veritable Records* in the context of an aspirationally unified and

inclusive dynasty, it is just as common to encounter in the writings of Ming officials the passionate plea for “vigorously defending the boundary between Hua and yi” (*yan Hua yi zhi fang*). How then should one make sense of, in the case of the Ming dynasty, the distinction between *Han* and *Hua*?

To answer this question, let us consider some of the references to the label *Hua ren* in the *Veritable Records*. To begin with, it is evident that, from the point of view of Ming rulers and officials, Hua people were identifiable by, among other traits, their language, clothing, or (even) currency used. While this understanding is at times explicitly stated in the *Ming shilu*, often it is simply implied. This we could see, for instance, from the observations made by Zhang Han (1510–93) in 1572 when he was serving as the grand coordinator of Shaanxi in the northwest. As recorded in a memorial submitted by the Ministry of War, Zhang Han noted that because the caitiffs (*lu*) around the areas of Lanzhou and Hezhou (in present-day Gansu) had been authorized to trade with *Zhongguo*, they had been able to acquire both clothing and coins from the Central Dominion. As a result, Zhang was concerned that “in case spies sent by the *lu* imitate the style of the hats and gowns of the Hua people, it would be difficult to distinguish between the genuine and the bogus.” While this somewhat cryptic entry in the *Veritable Records* raises more questions than it answers, it is clear that, for Zhang Han, there were particular practices (in this case, the adoption of certain styles of dress) that were obviously associated with being Hua.¹⁹

It is true that Zhang Han did not explain the relationship between *Han* and *Hua* (nor, one suspects, would it occur to him to do so), but he did offer us a useful clue. For Ming rulers and officials, the concept of *Zhongguo* was a political as well as cultural one. The Central Dominion was where the state apparatus extended its reach, and it was where, by definition, civilization prevailed. During the Ming, people or subjects of the Central Dominion were often referred to as *Zhongguo ren*, *Zhongguo zhi ren*, or *Zhongguo zhi min*, but they were also routinely identified as “Hua people.” Consider, for instance, this entry from 1585 in the *Veritable Records*: “It is reported by the Ministry of Rites that the king of Chosŏn Yi Yeon [r. 1567–1608] has returned a *Hua ren*, who had drifted cross the sea.” The entry then goes on to make a note of the response of the Wanli emperor (r. 1573–1620), which was to order the Ministry to keep a record and to offer the king of Chosŏn a gift after a certain number of such returnees had been reached. There are again a number of intriguing questions that cannot be adequately answered by a single report (how did the Hua person in this case “drift across the sea” [*piao hai*]? was the person a victim of unforeseen circumstances

associated with day-to-day seafaring? or was the person part of the broader “piracy” problem frequently mentioned in the Chosŏn records?), but a quick survey of related entries in the *Ming shilu* does suggest that referring to the people *from* the Central Dominion as *Hua ren* was a common occurrence.²⁰

Consider also the case of Liu Ba and Dang-ha. In an entry dated to 1479 in the *Veritable Records*, it is noted that Liu Ba and Dang-ha were originally from the area of the Dongning Guard in the Liaodong region in the northeast. It is further reported that, because the two had been caught stealing horses, they were forced to escape to the nearby Jianzhou region, where they were later seized by some Mongols (*lu*), who proceeded to use Liu Ba and Dang-ha as their guides as they engaged in pillaging and plundering along the Ming border. As it turned out, according to the entry in the *Ming shilu*, in time Liu Ba and Dang-ha would try to pass themselves off as Mongol chieftains and lead a tribute mission to the Ming court. It was not until after they had been recognized by those who had known them since their Liaodong days that the two were taken into Ming custody. For our purpose, what is remarkable about this episode is the petition made on the men’s behalf by the Ministry of War: “Although [Liu] Ba, Dang-ha, and others are Hua people, because they did pretend [*mao*] to be *lu* and offer tributes [to the court], they were in fact envoys [*shi chen*].” As such, the petition continues, the two men should be freed so as to avoid creating an unwelcome precedent for future dealings. The ministers in question might have been concerned about unnecessary confrontations with the Mongols. But what is especially noteworthy about the petition in the context of our discussion is, again, the reference to *Hua* as primarily a geo-political (rather than cultural-civilizational) label.²¹

Let us go beyond the *Veritable Records* and consider the observations made by the noted late-Ming literatus-traveler Wang Shixing (1547–98). In many ways a typical scholar-official of his time, Wang would, in due course, pass the highest level of the civil service examinations and serve in a variety of official posts both in the capital and at the far-flung corners of the Ming realm. But Wang Shixing was in other ways highly unusual. He seems to have derived a great deal of satisfaction from his travels, and he has left behind a significant corpus of writings concerning the geography of the Ming territory. Here I will focus on two passages in his *Further Elucidations on My Extensive Record of Travels* (*Guang zhi yi*, pref. 1597). In the first one, Wang seeks to offer his readers an overview of the complexity of the demographic situation in the border region of Yunnan in the southwest. But before he proceeds to catalog the *yi* peoples there (the Bo and the Luoluo, among others), Wang Shixing makes the interesting observations that “of all the provinces [in the

Ming] it is only in Yunnan that the presence of a motley of *yi* peoples can be found in every single prefecture” and that “only those who have been stationed at the guards and battalions [in the province] are people of *Zhonghua* [*Zhonghua ren*].” Elsewhere in his text (as we will see below) Wang would have occasion to refer to *Han ren*. So the reference to *Zhonghua ren* (or *Hua ren*) is illuminating for two reasons: the label *Zhonghua* is no doubt an allusion to the “civilized” nature of the military personnel in question, but it is also used here to draw attention to the distinction between the “natives” of the border region and people who have come from the Central Dominion.²²

The second passage from Wang Shixing’s *Further Elucidations* is again a description of the variety of peoples, only in this case it is in the context of what is present-day southern Hunan:

[The areas of] Shizhou, Baojing, and Yongshun are right there in the midst of the mountains and streams, lands and structures, [that comprise our country] within the seas. Yet these areas have been occupied by people of the Panhu stock [*zhong lei*]. . . . To the south of these areas is Chenzhou, and further south [of Chenzhou] are Liu[zhou] and Qing[yuan]. The clans [there] are all from the same stock, and the customs [of the people] are similar. This was the land known as Qianzhong during the Qin and Han periods. Because the areas south of Chenzhou had been through repeated military campaigns; the people there have been divided into *yi* and Han: whereas *yi* people are under the command of native chieftains, Han people are under the administration of regular officials. . . . However, even in areas where Han people and Han laws prevail, while the dress and language of those from walled-towns and markets are that of *Hua* people, the customs of those from the [more remote] valleys are often mixed with that of the Yao [i.e., *yi*].²³

Here then is a passage where both the labels *Han ren* and *Hua ren* are deployed. In this case, the references to Han people and Han law are clearly meant to draw attention to the distinction between areas under the control of native chieftains and those under the rule of regular officials. As such, *Han* takes on a political/administrative dimension that is similar to some of the uses of *Hua* we have seen above. At the same time, Wang Shixing does make a distinction here between *Han* and *Hua*. If in this passage the label *Han* seems to carry a more obvious political/administrative connotation, *Hua* (especially in light of the references to the dress and language of *Hua ren*) does appear to have a more ethno/cultural bend.

So what should one make of the relationship between *Han* and *Hua* in the Ming period? To be sure, as others have observed, the two labels have different origins, and the “contents” associated with them have, as a result of various historical contingencies, changed over time as well. And as we have noted, at least from the perspectives of Ming rulers and officials, the two identifications did bear important, if subtle, differences

(with *Hua* being more closely aligned with what may be understood as “Chineseness”). Still, especially in the context of the Ming dynasty (and as one could see from the passage by Wang Shixing just discussed), it would be a mistake to simply characterize *Han* an “ethno-cultural” label while *Hua* a “political-administrative” one. The facts are that, in contrast to the preceding Yuan and the succeeding Qing dynasties, there was during the Ming a great deal of overlapping between the identifications *Han* and *Hua*, and there was—to borrow Mark Elliott’s words—a “closing of the distance between ethno-cultural and political-administrative terms.”²⁴

IN THE SHADOW OF THE QING

To be sure, claims about the “Han-ness” of the Ming dynasty are not entirely mistaken. Zhu Yuanzhang, the founding emperor, did justify the ascendance of the Ming in part by claiming to be “recovering the native land of our Han people.” Laws and regulations of the Ming dynasty were not designed to recognize a formal legal status for *Han ren*, but from time to time, in imperial edicts as well as official memorials, distinctions were made between “Han people” and the *fan*, the *yi*, the *wo*, among other “non-Han” peoples. And though it is not always clear from the written sources what constituted the “Han-ness” of Han people (for instance, as far as one could tell, there was never any stipulation in the Ming period regarding what defined “Han dress”) or how Ming rulers and officials understood the differences between *Han* and *Hua*, there was a recognition of “Han” as a category that is akin to what we may refer to as “ethnic.” In other words, there does seem to be in the Ming dynasty a collective imagination (albeit perhaps limited to those who were part of the ruling elite) of a Han community whose members were believed to be inherently related to one another, whether historically, geographically, linguistically, culturally, or—even—genealogically.²⁵

That said, it is useful to remember that, even though Ming rulers and officials did imbue the identification *Han* with renewed significance, much of what gives “Han-ness” such import in our times is the consequence of the rise of nationalism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. During the Qing dynasty, as others have pointed out, the distance between *Han* and *Hua* would once again widen, as Qing emperors (especially in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) came to consider themselves rightful rulers of “multiple constituencies” and sought whenever possible to project an image of what Pamela Crossley has referred to as “simultaneous emperorship.” For Qing emperors, if

Hua was a reference to the civilization that was *Zhongguo*, then Han people were just one (albeit a large one, especially when compared with the Manchus, the Mongols, etc.) among a number of constituencies of the Central Dominion. That “Han-ness”—however it was interpreted—would emerge again in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries as a defining characteristic of China is a story that has been told a number of times. What is worth reiterating here is that, in their efforts to fabricate a Chinese nation (*Zhonghua minzu*) out of a motley of peoples with different cultures and historical memories, it has become necessary for political and opinion leaders, even to this day, to emphasize the centrality of Han people in the constitution of China.²⁶

So rather than consider the Ming dynasty as a time of resurgence of a long-standing, self-evident people known as Han, it would be more useful to think of this as a period when the identification *Han* was consciously deployed to mark the perceived distance between those who were deemed *natively* “Chinese” and those who were not. The difference between these two framings is subtle but obviously important. For Zhu Yuanzhang, the significance of his empire-building efforts lay not simply on the overthrowing of a dynasty who had apparently lost the Mandate of Heaven; nor did it lie just on the successful pushing back of the northern barbarians that were the Mongols. What the founding emperor of the Ming wanted to emphasize as well was his (historic) achievement of recovering the land of “our Han people.” One may not necessarily agree with Elliott’s suggestion that, “[h]ad Yuan rule lasted longer, or had the Mongols not defeated the Song, it is conceivable that Chinese people today would be calling themselves the ‘Nanzu’ or ‘Songzu.’” Yet, based on our discussion, it would seem prudent “to regard the common identity shared by Hanren today very much as an early modern artifact, the result of the Ming imperial enterprise, made urgent because of, and enabled by, the persistent occupation of significant parts of the Central Lands by Northern Others,” and it would seem fair to consider the “Han-ness” of China—as it is now generally conceived—ultimately a product of a series of historical contingencies.²⁷

In the end, it should be emphasized that the distinction between Han and non-Han was only one among a range of mechanisms Ming rulers and officials used to create a sense of control and to project a semblance of order. As I have explained elsewhere, it was desirable—and often necessary—for agents or representatives of the centralizing state to distinguish and categorize the variety of peoples who either lived within the Ming realm or were in constant contact with the Ming state. Among the distinctions or binaries employed, the most persistent (apart from the male/female division) was no doubt one that contrasted tax-paying subjects (*min*) with those who were deemed outcasts of sorts (*man*, *zei*,

kou, etc.). Another commonly deployed binary was one that distinguished between the “civilized” and those who were considered “beyond the pale” (*hua wai*). In this context, the Han/non-Han divide could be seen as lying somewhere between that of *min* and *man* and between that of *Hua* and *yi*. Much as one is tempted to associate “Han people” with a particular set of largely immobile attributes (language, clothing, etc.), it is perhaps more judicious to consider *Han* as one of a range of identifications Ming rulers and officials found useful in laying claims of the Central Dominion.²⁸

NOTES

- 1 The author would like to thank Kenneth Swope and Sarah Schneewind for their helpful comments.
- 2 *Ming Shilu* (referred to hereafter as *MSL*), *Taizu shilu*, 26.404. The use of the label *Zhongguo* to refer to something akin to a “central dominion” (at that time the region that centered on the Wei and Luo river valleys) can be traced to the early Western Zhou period (ca. 1100–771 BCE), while the use of *Hua* or *Xia* to denote the people of *Zhongguo* (and, conversely, *man* or *yi*, among other labels, to refer to people beyond the central dominion) can be found in records dated to no later than the Spring and Autumn period (770–481 BCE). See Chen Liankai, “Zhongguo, Hua–Yi, Fan–Han, Zhonghua, Zhonghua min zu,” esp. 211–26; Li Feng, *Landscape and Power in Early China: The Crisis and Fall of the Western Zhou, 1045–771 BC* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 285–93.
- 3 *MSL*, *Taizu shilu*, 92.1614.
- 4 Yang Shaoyou and Mo Junqing, *Ming dai minzu shi* (Chengdu: Sichuan minzu chubanshe, 1996), general preface, 1–3.
- 5 Mote, “Introduction,” in *CHC*, Vol. 7, 1, 8; Farmer, *Zhu Yuanzhang and Early Ming Legislation* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 81–82 (see also Farmer’s essay in the present volume, which situates the Ming within a broader Eurasian context).
- 6 Pamela K. Crossley, Helen F. Siu, and Donald S. Sutton, eds., “Introduction,” in *Empire at the Margins: Culture, Ethnicity, and Frontier in Early Modern China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2006) 2.
- 7 For a discussion of the categorization and hierarchy of population during the Yuan dynasty, see Frederick Mote, “Chinese Society under Mongol Rule,” in Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett, eds., *Cambridge History of China, Volume 6: Alien Regimes and Border States, 907–1368* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 616–94.
- 8 Jiang Yonglin, *Great Ming Code*, lxxvii; translation of the article discussed is based on the version on page 88.
- 9 *Ming huidian* (hereafter referred to as *MHD*), 104.569. Yü Chün-fang, “Ming Buddhism,” in *CHC*, 918–19; Toh, “Tibetan Buddhism in Ming China,” Ph.D. Diss., Harvard University, 2004.
- 10 *MHD*, 132.677; 169.868. For a discussion of the perceptions of Ming officials and scholars of the distinctions between “Chinese” (*hua*) and “non-Chinese” (*yi*), see, for example, Leo K. Shin, *The Making of the Chinese State: Ethnicity and Expansion on the Ming Borderlands* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

2006), chap 5.

- 11 MHD, 123.632; 166.851.
- 12 For a discussion—also in part adopting a quantitative approach—of the increased use of “Han” as an ethnonym during the Song period, see Nicolas Tackett, *The Origins of the Chinese Nation: Song China and the Forging of an East Asian World Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), esp. 156–66.
- 13 For the Hongwu emperor, see MSL, *Taizu shilu*, 183.2758. For other references to differences, see, for example, MSL, *Yingzong shilu*, 281.6042; *Shizong shilu*, 51.1272; *Shenzong shilu*, 568.10694. For impersonation, see, for example, MSL, *Xianzong shilu*, 226.3875, 260.4394; *Shenzong shilu*, 484.9133, 568.10694. For present-day efforts for a kind of Han “self-refashioning,” see Kevin Carrico, *The Great Han: Race, Nationalism, and Tradition in China Today* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2017).
- 14 For the continued presence and influence of the Mongols on the Ming polity and society, see, among his many publications, David Robinson, “Images of Subject Mongols under the Ming Dynasty,” *Late Imperial China* 25.1 (2004), 59–123, and *Martial Spectacles of the Ming Court* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2013).
- 15 MSL, *Xianzong shilu*, 176.3234.
- 16 For a case study of the complexity of the “ethnic” conditions in the northern border regions in the sixteenth century, see, for example, Kenneth Swope, “All Men are Not Brothers: Ethnic Identity and Dynastic Loyalty in the Ningxia Mutiny of 1592,” *Late Imperial China* 24.1 (2003), 79–124.
- 17 MSL, *Xianzong shilu*, 198.3479–81.
- 18 MSL, *Shizong shilu*, 14.478; 74.1662.
- 19 MSL, *Muzong shilu*, 66.1578.
- 20 MSL, *Shenzong shilu*, 156.2879. In the *Veritable Records of the Chosŏn Dynasty* (*Chosŏn wangjo sillok*), people who appeared to have “drifted” from the Central Dominion are variously referred to as *Tangin*, *Hanin*, or *Hwain*.
- 21 MSL, *Xianzong shilu*, 191.3396.
- 22 Wang Shixing, *Guang zhi yi*, 5.129.
- 23 Wang Shixing, *Guang zhi yi*, 4.95.
- 24 Elliott, “Hushuo,” 189.
- 25 For a discussion of the case of the Song dynasty, see Tackett, *Origins of the Chinese Nation*.
- 26 Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror*; Leibold, *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism*.
- 27 Mark Elliott, “Hushuo: The Northern Other and the Naming of the Han Chinese,” in Thomas S. Mullaney et al., eds., *Critical Han Studies: The History, Representation, and Identity of China’s Majority* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2012), 188, 189.
- 28 Shin, *Making of the Chinese State*.

CHAPTER 11

THE HALL OF SUPREME HARMONY AS A SIMULACRUM OF MING DYNASTY CONSTRUCTION



Aurelia Campbell

It is hard to imagine a premodern building in China more iconic than the emperor's audience hall, the great Hall of Supreme Harmony (*Tiande dian*), in the Forbidden City in Beijing (Figure 11.1). The hall is located at the direct center of the Outer Court of the palaces, within a long series of gates and walls, and looks south across an expansive courtyard that served as a grand stage for ceremonies. Together with the two halls behind it, the Hall of Central Harmony (*Zhonghe dian*) and the Hall of Preserving Harmony (*Baohe dian*), collectively known as the Three Halls, it is elevated on a massive rammed-earth platform faced with white stone (Figure 11.2). The current structure dates to 1695, during the Kangxi period of the Qing dynasty, but it has been renovated many times since then. Today, the fresh coats of paint and shiny roof tiles convey a sense of newness that obscures the building's long and tumultuous history of destruction, ruin, and reconstruction that spanned nearly 250 years, from 1420 to 1695.



Figure 11.1 Hall of Supreme Harmony (*Taihe dian*), Forbidden City, Beijing, last reconstructed in 1695. Photograph by the author, 2017

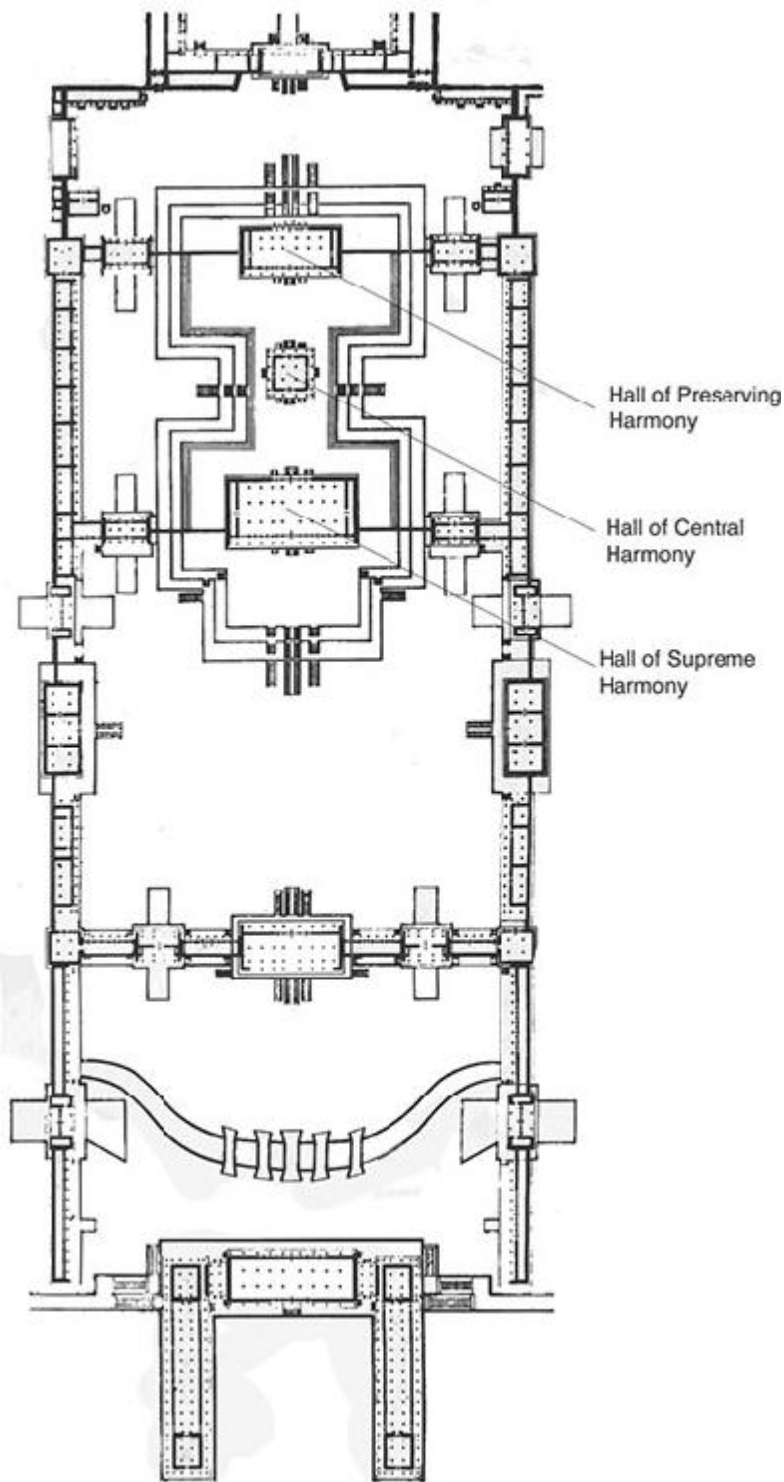


Figure 11.2 Forbidden City Outer Court ground plan, Beijing. After Liu

This hall was first built in 1420 under the Yongle emperor. Known as the Hall of Revering Heaven (*Fengtian dian*), it must have been one of the most magnificent buildings in all of Chinese history and therefore an apt manifestation of the imperial power that was exercised under its towering roof. But just four months after it was completed, the building was struck by lightning and burnt to the ground. In the fifth year of the Zhengtong reign (1440), it was completely reconstructed, but a century later, in the 36th year of the Jiajing reign (1557), the hall burnt down again. It was rebuilt several years later, in the 41st year of the Jiajing reign (1562), when its name was changed to the Hall of the Imperial Absolute (*Huangji dian*). The hall burnt down for a third time in the 25th year of the Wanli reign (1597), but 30 years passed before it was reconstructed again, in the seventh year of the Tianqi reign (1627), at the very end of the Ming dynasty. In the Shunzhi period (1643–61) of the Qing dynasty, it was renamed the Hall of Supreme Harmony and, in the 18th year of the Kangxi reign (1679), was again severely damaged by fire. The hall was reconstructed for the last time in the 34th year of the Kangxi reign (1695).

Most extant studies of the Hall of Supreme Harmony focus on the structure and ornamentation of the final iteration of the building from the Kangxi period and thus ignore the building's complex architectural history.¹ This essay instead views the Hall of Supreme Harmony as just one link in a long chain of reconstructions extending back over the course of almost the entire Ming dynasty. Each act of rebuilding the hall was an exercise in decision-making, involving a host of complex ideological and practical problems. An investigation into this process therefore reveals a great deal about what patrons and craftsmen during this time considered important and where they placed value within a building and why. In addition to shedding light on the meaning and practice of reconstruction in Ming China, this study aims to demystify the great hall at the beginning of the long chain, Yongle's Hall of Revering Heaven. Based on a combination of textual and material evidence, I suggest that this hall would have been one of the largest and grandest buildings in premodern Chinese history. It set high standards that not only burdened each subsequent reconstruction with an enormous number of constraints, but ultimately made it impossible to ever reproduce the original building. Each reconstruction of this hall can therefore be considered a simulacrum of Yongle's great Hall of Revering Heaven, constantly gesturing toward the absent original in an effort to reach its ideal, while continuously regressing from it on account of

practical limitations.

THE LONG HISTORY OF DESTRUCTION AND RECONSTRUCTION

In the 18th year of the Yongle reign (1420), the construction of the Hall of Revering Heaven at Yongle's new northern capital was completed. On New Year's Day of the 19th year (1421), Yongle invited his ministers to the hall and banqueted them in celebration. But not long afterwards, in the fourth month, a fire broke out, destroying all of the Three Halls.² Two days later, following tradition, the devastated emperor issued an "Edict in Response to the Disaster of the Hall of Revering Heaven" (*Fengtian dian zai kuan xu zhao*), in which he solicited "sincere words" (*zhenyan*) from his ministers in order to determine why the natural disaster had happened. In response, the officials cited the emperor's negligence in the ceremonies to heaven, unequal taxes and corvée, inadequate supplies for the conscripted soldiers, and excessive demands from the people, among many other reasons. They recommended moving the capital back to Nanjing, where Yongle's father, the Hongwu emperor, had established the first capital of the Ming dynasty.³

Regarding the methodologies governing the design of the northern capital, historical records essentially only tell us that Yongle "followed the pattern" of his father's capital in Nanjing, but that his capital "surpassed" his father's "in grandeur."⁴ This is corroborated in the names and organization of the principal buildings in Yongle's palaces, which were indeed identical to a description of the Nanjing palace plan that survives in the official Ming histories:

The main hall is the Hall of Revering Heaven. In front of it is the Gate of Revering Heaven. Behind [the Hall of Revering Heaven] is the Hall of the Imperial Canopy and behind the Hall of the Imperial Canopy is the Hall of Scrupulous Behavior. On either side of each of these halls are covered corridors. Behind the Hall of Scrupulous Behavior are the palaces. At the front is the Palace of Heavenly Purity and at the rear is the Palace of Earthly Tranquility. The Six Palaces are arranged in succession after this. This is surrounded by the Imperial Wall. The gate at the south is called the Meridian Gate, the gate at the east is called Eastern Magnificence, the gate at the west is called Western Magnificence, and the gate at the north is called Xuanwu.⁵

Unfortunately, little information about the original appearance of the Hall of Revering Heaven in Yongle's capital was recorded before it was destroyed, though we do know that, like its counterpart in Nanjing, the hall was 9 by 5 bays instead of the more traditional 11 by 5 bays, and that on either side of the hall were sloped covered corridors leading to storied towers.⁶

Despite using Nanjing as a model, Yongle constructed his capital on a much larger scale and with better quality materials than his father had used. By far the most important of these materials was *nanmu*, a tall, thick, and dense timber that only grows in the old-growth forests of southwestern China. Yongle transported hundreds of thousands of these trees to the capital via the Yangzi River and the Grand Canal.⁷ The extraction of these *nanmu* timbers was enormously difficult and costly and became increasingly challenging over the course of the dynasty, as more and more of the large timbers near the waterways were cut down. The Ming court's continuous desire for this wood eventually caused considerable deforestation of old-growth trees near waterways as well as rebellions among the minority peoples who were forced to provide the wood as tribute.⁸ Considering that the Hall of Revering Heaven was the earliest Ming imperial hall constructed out of *nanmu*, we can be sure that it employed the largest *nanmu* timbers available. Today, only one *nanmu* hall from the Yongle reign survives: the Sacrificial Hall at the emperor's tomb, Changling, north of Beijing (Figures 11.3 and 11.4).⁹



Figure 1.3 Sacrificial Hall (*Ling'en dian*), at Yongle's Tomb, Changling, Changping district, Beijing, 1426. Photograph by the author, 2017

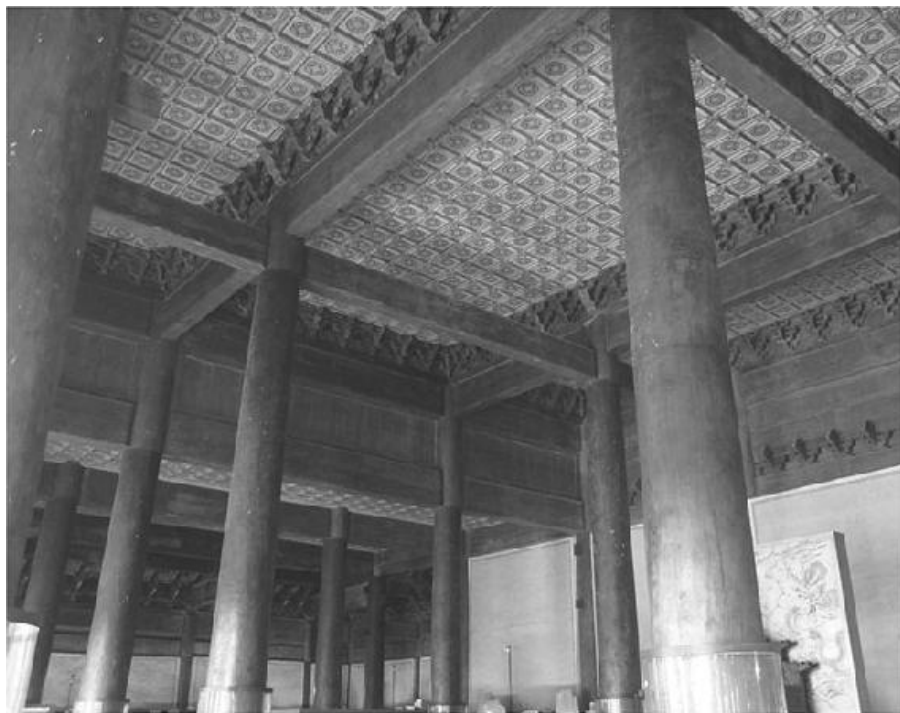


Figure 11.4 *Nanmu* columns and beams inside the Sacrificial Hall.
Photograph by the author, 2014

RECONSTRUCTIONS AND EXPANSIONS

The first reconstruction of the Hall of Revering Heaven took place in the fifth year of the Zhengtong period (1440). Of all the reconstructions, this was probably the closest to the Yongle-era original. Because only 20 years separated the two projects, the appearance of the first hall and the mode of its construction undoubtedly still remained in the local memory. Even more importantly, some of the same craftsmen were involved in the construction of both halls, and it is unlikely that they would have made significant alterations to their original design.¹⁰ Further, the official Ming histories document that in the Zhengtong reign, 380,000 *nan* and *shan*¹¹ logs from the Yongle period were still stored in the Beijing timber yards.¹² This means that builders did not face significant material constraints when reconstructing the hall. On the other hand, because the hall was constructed in only half a year's time, the hall's original structure and ornamentation may have been simplified.¹³

The Hall of Revering Heaven burnt down for a second time in the fourth month of the 36th year of the Jiajing reign (1557).¹⁴ In response,

the Jiajing emperor dispatched officials to the southwest of the country to gather *nan* timbers in order to rebuild it.¹⁵ This was not the first time that *nanmu* had been collected during the Jiajing reign. Fifteen years earlier, in the twentieth reign year (1541), the Imperial Ancestral Temple (Taimiao) burnt down and officials gathered 11,289 *nan* and *shan* logs for its reconstruction.¹⁶ That project, completed in the 24th year (1545), is the only other surviving large-scale *nanmu* building from the Ming dynasty besides the Sacrificial Hall at Yongle's tomb (Figure 11.5).¹⁷ As is clear from the material evidence, enough large timbers had been collected during the first Jiajing-era timber procurement mission to rebuild the Imperial Ancestral Temple with *nanmu*. Yet when the officials were dispatched to collect more *nanmu* for the reconstruction of the Hall of Revering Heaven, most of the large trees growing close to the waterways had already been harvested and only “second rate,” or smaller, timbers could be gathered.¹⁸



Figure 11.5 The main hall of the Imperial Ancestral Temple (*Taimiao*), located at the southeast corner of the Forbidden City, Beijing, 1545.

Photograph by the author, 2017

An important passage from the *Jiajing Veritable Records* documents a conversation between the emperor and his officials regarding how the reconstruction of the hall, now renamed the Hall of Imperial Absolute (*Huangji dian*), should be handled given the limitations of the material resources. Addressing his advisors, Jiajing remarks, “I am afraid that the former proportions certainly cannot be violated; therefore, we can just shrink [the scale] slightly and not compromise the original width of 30 *zhang* and depth of 15 *zhang*.”¹⁹

In this quote, in order to avoid “violating the former proportions” by a complete change of the structure, the emperor proposed that they instead shrink the size of the hall but keep the original proportions of

2:1 between the width and the depth of the building.²⁰ One of his advisors basically agreed, but offered a slightly different solution:

If we slightly diminish [the original size of the hall], it definitely will not violate the former proportions. I submit, however, that in the construction of a building, the erection of the platform is the main difficulty. Its cost is several times that of the wood and stone [of the building set on top of it]. If we change the measurements of the old foundation even a little bit, that one change will result in a hundred other changes. To change everything from the beginning would require extensive ramming and carpentry and a renewed expenditure of wealth and labor, it will drag on for months and years, and it will be exceedingly difficult to complete the building. I respectfully propose that we leave the depth and width of the base the same as before, but it is perhaps permissible to reduce the circumference and girth of the timber and stones in relation to the former measurements. I have discussed this with the other officials and they all support this proposal. We await the emperor's sanction.²¹

Therefore, instead of shrinking both the size of the hall and the size of the platform, only the size of the hall was scaled down at this time, while the platform atop which it was positioned remained intact.

The shortage of large *nan* timber materials evidently also impacted the way in which the columns inside the hall were created:

In the time of [Jiajing], *shan* replaced *nan* for the golden pillars. Their length was sufficient, but not their width. [As a result,] eight sections were converged around the central core of one trunk to form a pillar. The large beams used either three or four [sections] converged around one trunk.²²

This quote indicates that, first of all, in the third iteration of the hall, *shan* wood was used instead of the much more desirable *nan* wood for the construction of the interior (“golden”) columns. Yet although these *shan* timbers were tall enough, they were not thick enough for such an eminent building. Therefore, craftsmen had to fabricate thick columns by attaching long pieces of *shan* wood to the thinner central core, a technique known as the “wrapped-rim” (*baoxiang*) method (Figure 11.6).

In the sixth month of the 15th year of the Wanli reign (1597) the Hall of the Imperial Absolute was once again destroyed by fire.²³ Following precedent, Wanli dispatched officials to the southwest of the country in order to collect *nanmu* timbers for its reconstruction. Although by the 35th year of the Wanli reign (1607) an impressive 24,601 *nan* and *shan* timbers had been gathered, those of the “first grade,” or largest in size (probably over a meter in diameter), were impossible to find close enough to the waterways.²⁴ On account of the difficulties involved in procuring the timber, which were possibly exacerbated by continuing

unrest in the southwest, the reconstruction of the hall was put off until the 43rd year of the Wanli reign (1615) and not completed until the seventh year of the Tianqi reign (1627).²⁵ About this iteration of the hall historical records unfortunately tell us very little, though it is likely that the hall was expanded to 11 bays across the front at this time.

After being destroyed by an earthquake in the 18th year of the Kangxi reign (1679) of the Qing dynasty, the audience hall, now renamed the Hall of Supreme Harmony, was rebuilt for the fifth and final time in the 34th year of Kangxi's reign (1695). During this reconstruction, the court encountered the same problem as it had in the Jiajing and Wanli reigns: despite the great efforts made by officials dispatched to the southwestern regions of the country, large *nanmu* timbers growing next to the waterways could not be found.²⁶ In the 25th year of his reign (1686), after listening to a report outlining the enormous difficulties involved in trying to procure the *nanmu* needed for the reconstruction, Kangxi ordered that pine trees growing “north of the Great Wall” be used for the reconstruction of the hall instead of *nanmu*.²⁷ A recent analysis of the columns at the Hall of Supreme Harmony has revealed that, like the *shan* timber used in the Jiajing-era hall, the pine trunks were too thin to be used individually for columns and therefore the “wrapped rim” was used to fabricate the columns in this iteration of the hall as well. It was likely during this reconstruction that the two covered corridors that had flanked the hall since the Yongle period were replaced with brick walls in order to prevent the spread of fire.

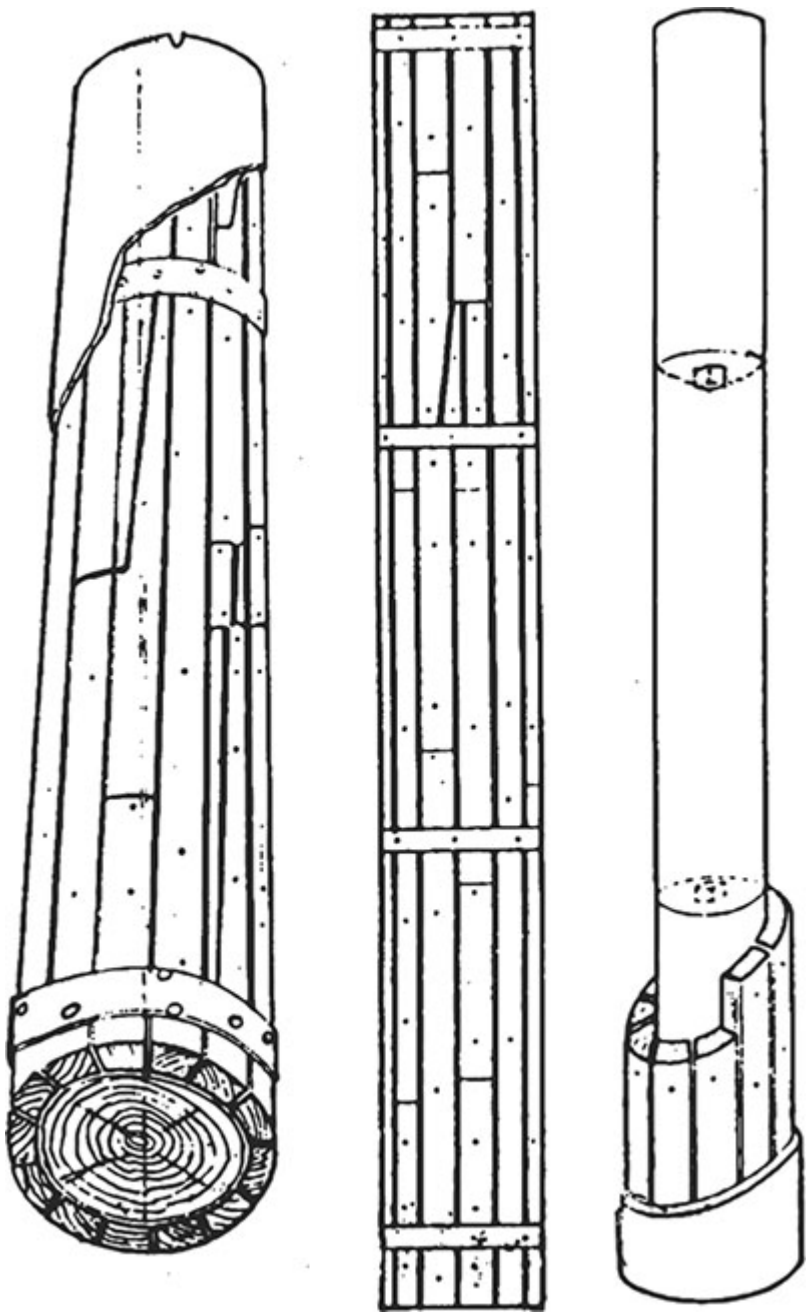


Figure 11.6 The “wrapped rim” (*baoxiang*) method of pillar construction. From Hu Shuping, “The Earthquake Resistant Properties of Chinese Traditional Architecture,” *Earthquake Spectra* 7, 3 (1991),

RECONSTRUCTION THEORIES AND METHODOLOGIES

The above discussion reveals some important information about what mattered most to the emperors in reconstructing this hall. It is evident that, above all else, the emperors were concerned with preserving an architectural continuity with the past. In addition to the building itself, which, relatively speaking, changed very little over the course of its history, the most obvious support for this claim is Jiajing's remark about how altering the form of the hall too drastically would be considered "violating" the "former system." Indeed, besides renaming the hall, none of the emperors involved in the reconstruction seems to have wanted to attach his own signature to it. Things we might otherwise expect from architectural projects of this scale and significance, such as innovation, creativity, or a sense of original design, are conspicuously absent from both the textual and material records.

As for what exactly was meant by the "former system," it seems to have been more general than specific. We find no discussion within the histories, for instance, of the particular structural aspects of the building: the size of the module, the types of bracket sets, the organization of columns, or the pitch of the roof—issues that form the basis of most scholarship on Chinese architectural history to date. These decisions were likely left up to the master craftsmen, who drew upon a set of preexisting conventions that dictated how a structure of a certain size and rank should be built, and were evidently of little concern to the emperors. This is not to say that rulers did not care about these things at all. Although no government construction manual was ever sponsored in the Ming, both the Song and Qing courts published exhaustive studies that addressed structural issues in an effort to economize labor and materials and to regulate construction practices.²⁸ Yet when it came to rebuilding the Hall of Revering Heaven, it did not seem to matter much whether particular aspects of the structure changed over time.

The "former system" must therefore relate to the hall's general typology, including the hipped roof and the number of bays across the front, as these were indispensable features of high-rank buildings in China. Thus, even when Jiajing knew that he had to reduce the scale of the hall on account of a shortage of timber materials, he still maintained the original proportions of 2 to 1 between the width and the depth of the building. Although shrinking the hall's original size may not have been considered "in violation" of the "old system," constructing a big enough building was still clearly a matter of great significance to the emperors. A large structure was necessary not only to convey the hall's

importance to the state, but also, more practically speaking, because the building had to maintain an appropriate sense of scale in relation to its surroundings, which had already been set in the Yongle reign. The platform atop which the hall was situated, for instance, measures a massive 108 meters in width and 62.6 meters in depth,²⁹ while the courtyard that envelopes it measures 130 meters north to south and 190 meters east to west.³⁰ If the hall itself were too small, it would be out of proportion with the rest of the architecture in the palace. Thus, the expansive platform, the large void of the courtyard, and ultimately even the walls and moat surrounding the palace became constraints within which the later master craftsmen had to work.

The enormous efforts that Jiajing, Wanli, and Kangxi spent on trying to obtain *nanmu* timbers for the reconstruction of the Hall of Revering Heaven also reveals the great importance of this construction material to the building's identity. Yongle was the first patron in the history of China to build the great halls in his palaces out of *nanmu* and, in doing so, he set the standard for the imperial construction material from that point onward. In fact, *nanmu* became so closely associated with the architecture of the Ming court that it was often simply called the "imperial wood" (*huangmu*).³¹ As is clear from the discussion above, *nanmu* was most highly valued for its large size, a feature that was proudly exhibited in the interior columns of the hall. On one hand, large columns were required to secure the structural soundness of large buildings. On the other hand, they possessed a symbolic value that pointed to the great power of the emperors to obtain and transport the massive logs all the way from the southwest of their empire. Therefore, even though large *nanmu* timbers could no longer be easily harvested from the mid-Jiajing reign onwards, craftsmen nonetheless created the illusion of the original, single-trunk *nanmu* columns by fabricating thick columns out of smaller timbers in their construction of the new buildings.

Each reconstruction of the Hall of Supreme Harmony was thus a negotiation between past and present, between preserving the ideal of the original hall, while responding to current demands. During each reconstruction, it was considered important to maintain the size, proportions, and material of the original building, if not more specific features as well. Yet the approach to reconstruction was not so rigid that it could not adapt to changing circumstances, such as new building methods or materials, if necessary. This approach differs from that at the famous Grand Shrine at Ise in Japan, which is rebuilt every twenty years as an exact copy of the original.³² It also differs from a Japanese building with a similar fate: the Great Buddha Hall (Daibutsuden) of Tōdaiji in Nara. This massive hall burnt down many times in its long

history, but, unlike the Hall of Supreme Harmony, with each reconstruction, the scale and features of the hall changed dramatically.³³

IMAGINING THE SCALE OF THE HALL OF REVERING HEAVEN

We have just determined that within the history of this building, the ghost of the original Yongle-era hall loomed large, setting a standard of monumentality that all later reconstructions strove to reach. But this then raises the question: just how big was the original Hall of Revering Heaven?

To answer this question, we can first examine three extant buildings that possess the same typology as the original Hall of Revering Heaven: The Sacrificial Hall at Yongle's tomb (1426), the main hall of the Imperial Ancestral Temple (1545), and the Hall of Supreme Harmony (1695). The most salient feature of all these buildings is their enormous size—they are all far larger than any other surviving hall in China. In addition, the buildings are all single story and are either 9 or 11 bays across the front and 5 bays in depth. They are each elevated on a three-tiered platform lined with balustrades and capped with a double-eave hipped roof covered in yellow-glazed tiles. As mentioned above, both the Sacrificial Hall and the main hall of the Imperial Ancestral Temple are the only two large-scale *nanmu* buildings still standing in China and therefore offer the closest analogy to the Hall of Revering Heaven. In addition to their shared structural typologies, all three buildings also served important and interconnected ritual functions for the state.³⁴

The Sacrificial Hall at Yongle's tomb is the closest in date to the original Hall of Revering Heaven. It measures 9 bays (66.90 meters) wide and 5 bays (29.3 meters) deep, with a proportion of 2.29:1 between the width and the depth. The width of the central bay is an enormous 10.3 meters. The hall is 25.90 meters in height and it is situated upon a 3.55-meter-tall platform, with a proportion of 1:7.3 between platform and building.³⁵ The hall contains 62 pillars, of which 32 support the main roof frame and 30 support the lower roof eaves.³⁶ The 4 columns in the center of the hall are the largest, measuring 13 meters in height and 1.17 meters in diameter.³⁷

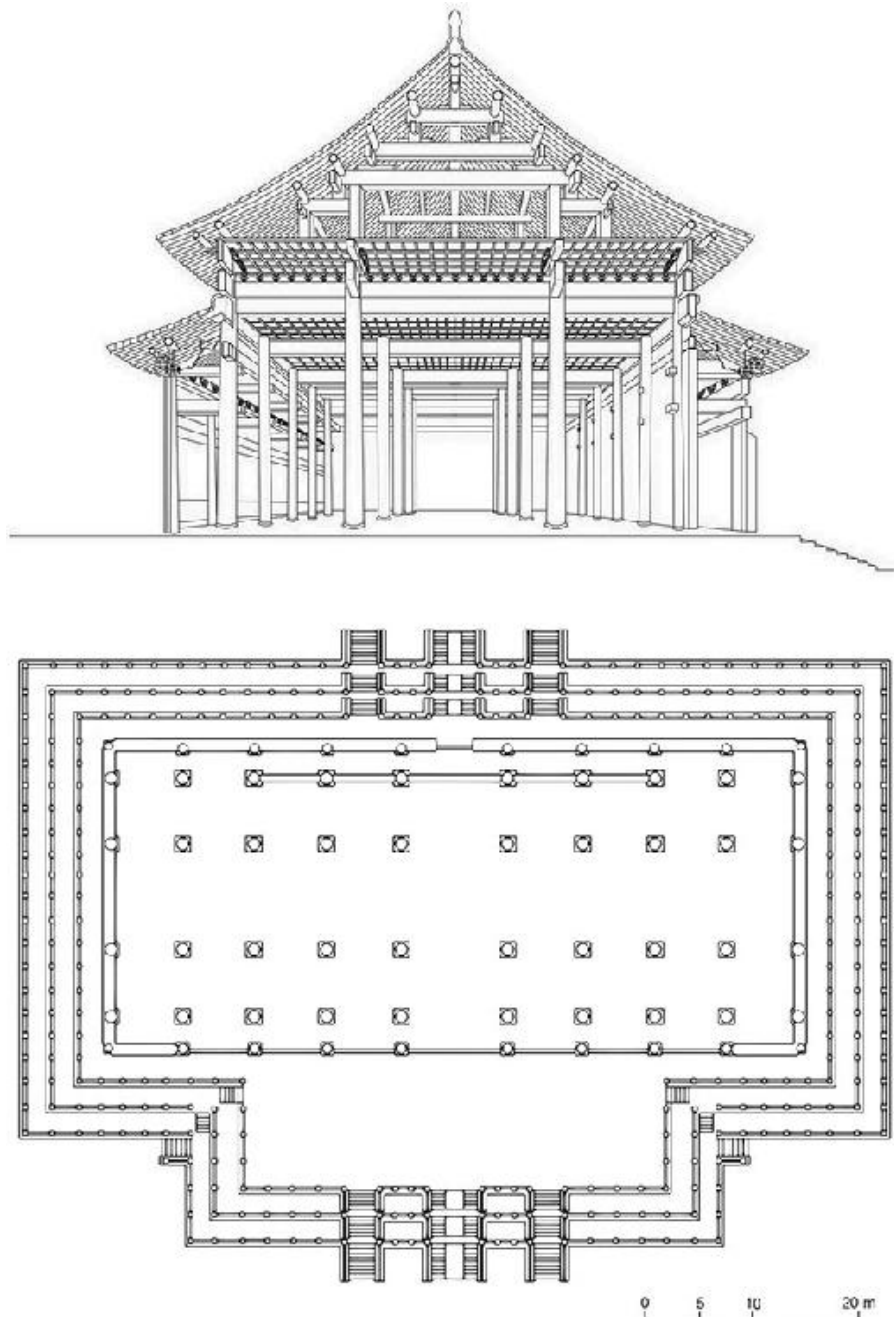


Figure 11.7a and b Sacrificial Hall section and ground plan. Section redrawn after Li Qianlang, “Changling Ling’endian” (Ling’endian at Chang’ling), *Zijin Cheng* 5 (2009), 19. Ground plan redrawn after Liu Dunzhen, “Ming Changling,” in *Liu Dunzhen Quanji, di yi juan*, Beijing: Zhongguo jianzhu gongye chubanshi, 2007, 278

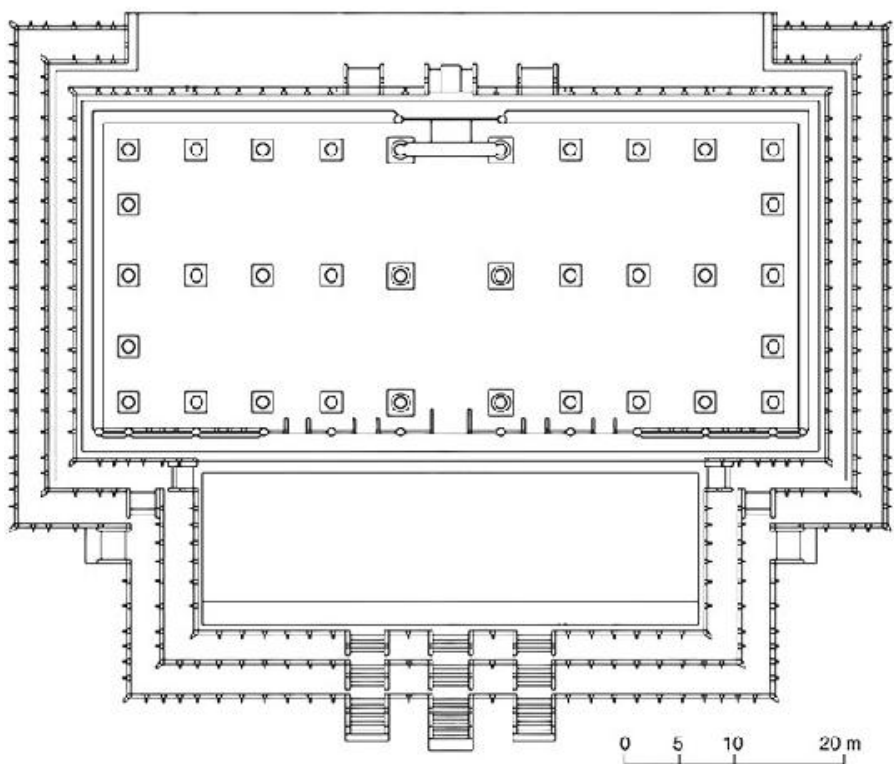
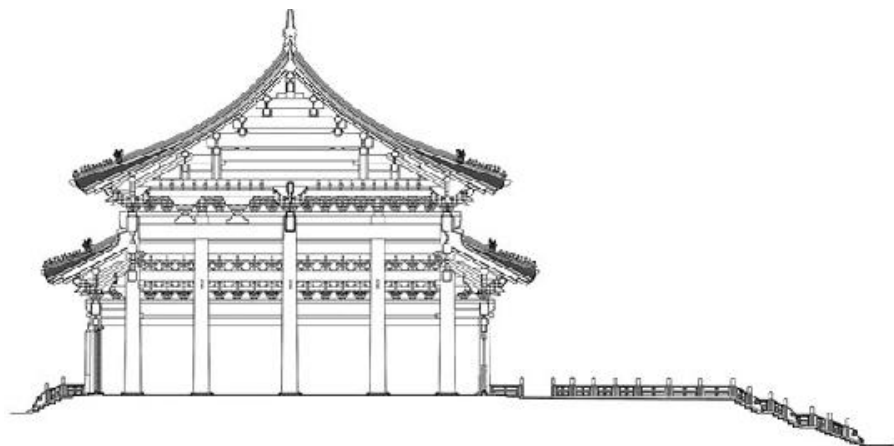


Figure 11.8a and b Ancestral Temple section and ground plan, redrawn after Yan Kai, “Beijing Taimiao jianzhu” (MA thesis, Tianjin University 2004), 56 and 55

The main hall of the Imperial Ancestral Temple is 11 bays (66.79 meters) wide and 6 bays (29.09 meters) deep, with a proportion of 2.11:1 between the width and depth of the building. The width of the central bay is 9.60 meters. Originally the hall was 9 bays across the

front; the two side-most bays were added during a Qianlong period reconstruction.³⁸ The hall measures 28.83 meters tall and is situated atop a three-tier white stone platform measuring 3.64 meters tall, with a proportion of 1:7.92 between the platform and the building.³⁹ It contains 68 *nanmu* columns, 34 of which support the main roof frame.⁴⁰ The tallest of columns measure 13.32 meters in height and 1.23 meters in diameter, slightly taller and wider than those in the Sacrificial Hall.⁴¹ The largest beams in the hall measure a massive 1.5 x .95 meters, height to width, meaning that they would have been made out of even thicker *nanmu* trunks than the columns.⁴²

The Hall of Supreme Harmony is 11 bays (60.08 meters) across the front and 5 bays (33.33 meters) in depth, with a proportion of 1.80:1 between the width and the depth.⁴³ The central bay is 8.55 meters wide.⁴⁴ The 26.92-meter-tall building sits atop a massive three-tiered white stone platform measuring, at its widest, 108 meters in width, 62.6 meters in depth, and 8.13 meters tall, with a proportion of 1:3.31 between the height of the base and the height of the building.⁴⁵ Seventy-two pine wood pillars stand inside the hall, 40 of which support the main roof and 32 of which support the lower roof eaves. The largest columns measure an impressive 12.7 meters in height and 1.06 meters in diameter.⁴⁶ However, as mentioned above, they are not solid single tree trunks, but are instead fabricated out of many different parts to look like whole columns.⁴⁷ The fact that even the composite columns maintained approximately the same dimensions as the *nanmu* columns in the Ming halls suggests that the dimensions of the natural material had set the standard for the column size from that point onward.

The information summarized above reveals that these three buildings were all about the same size. Their widths range from about 61 to 67 meters, their depths from about 29 to 33 meters, and their heights from about 26 to 29 meters. The columns that support the main roof frames are all approximately 13 meters in height and a little over one meter in diameter, including the composite columns in the Hall of Supreme Harmony. We can compare these dimensions to those of the Hall of Dynastic Prosperity (*Longguo dian*) at Gautama Monastery (*Qutan si*) in Ledu, Qinghai province, a very high-rank and well preserved imperially constructed Buddha hall from the Yongle era. In contrast to the massive halls just examined, this building measures only about 33 meters in width, 19 meters in depth, and 16 meters in height, and the interior columns measure only 8.5 meters in height.⁴⁸

The relatively consistent dimensions of the Sacrificial Hall, the main hall of the Imperial Ancestral Temple, and the Hall of Supreme Harmony leads us to an important conclusion: there was a limit to how

large buildings of this type could be constructed. Indeed, although theoretically a Chinese building could be expanded indefinitely in width by adding more bays, ritual conventions dictated that the main hall of a palace had to be 9 or 11 bays across the front. This means that the wider a building was, the further apart the columns would have to be spaced. Yet if the spans between two columns were too great, the lateral members connecting them would sag under the heavy roof load.⁴⁹ In contrast to the width, the depth of a hall was limited by the length of the transverse beams, though it could be expanded somewhat by adding lower roof eaves at the front and back of the hall. Furthermore, as we can gather from the halls examined above, single-story buildings could not be constructed much more than 30 meters tall; height could only be added by building up the rammed-earth platform beneath the hall. Finally, although some *nanmu* trees grew as large as 30 meters tall with diameters of four meters, they were evidently too rare to be used for construction, which demanded many columns of a relatively uniform size.⁵⁰ Thus, the *nanmu* columns used in the Ming dynasty probably did not exceed 14 meters tall and 1.5 meters in diameter.

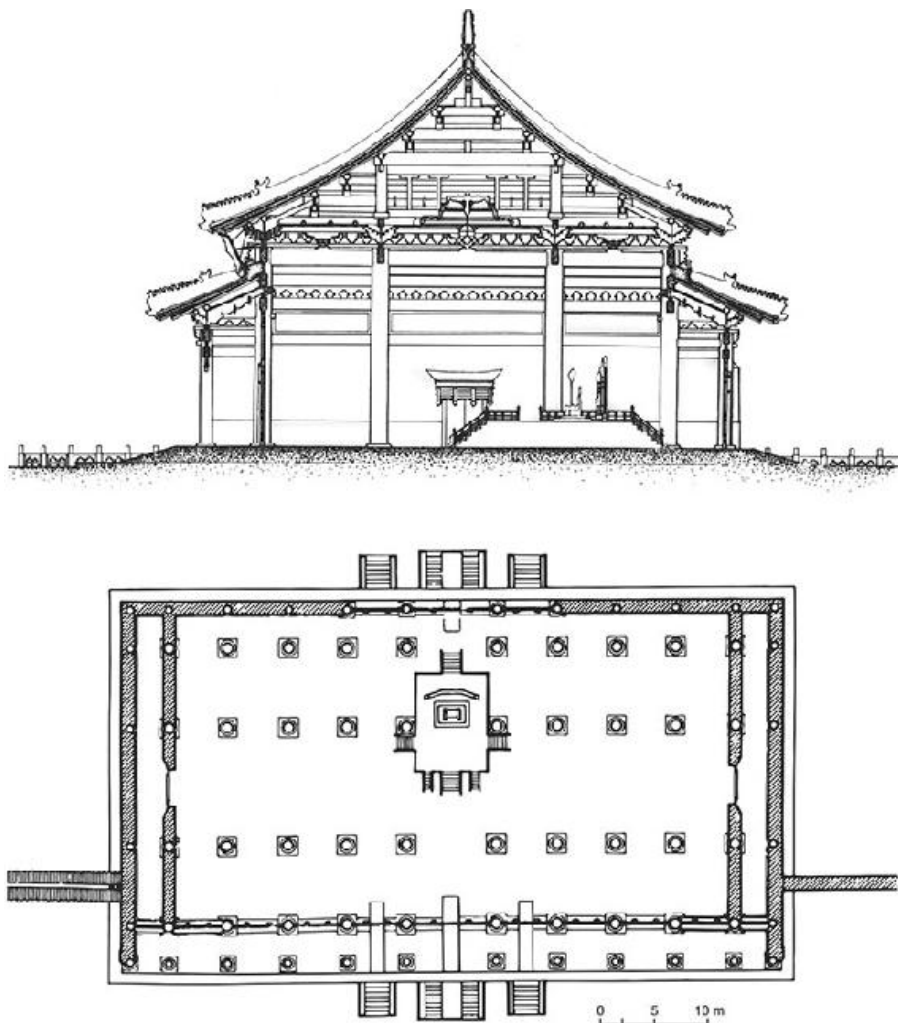


Figure 11.9a and b Hall of Supreme Harmony section and ground plan, after Liu Dunzhen, *Zhongguo gudai jianzhu shi*, Beijing: Zhongguo jianzhu gongye chubanshi, 2005, 297

Trying to determine the scale of the original Hall of Revering Heaven is not a new problem within the field of Chinese architectural history; in the last decade, several leading architectural historians have taken up the issue. Li Xieping, for instance, based his estimation on the Jiajing-era record discussed above in which the emperor describes the original hall as being “30 *zhang* wide and 15 *zhang* deep.” Because one Ming dynasty *zhang* is equal to approximately 3.17 meters, Li calculated that the building would have originally measured 95.1 by 47.44 meters.⁵¹ Lin Zhe also took the Jiajing-era record as a starting point and, comparing it to the textual descriptions of the dimensions of palaces from earlier

dynasties, concluded that it was indeed possible that Yongle's Hall of Revering Heaven was constructed at that large a scale.⁵² Qinghua Guo instead examined the building's relation to the marble platform. Assuming that the size of the marble platform had not changed and that the hall was originally placed in the center of the platform, she calculated that the hall would have measured 83.4 meters in width and 37.5 meters in depth. She also suggests that the tallest columns would have been around 14.9 meters in height.⁵³ None of these scholars' estimations seems reasonable to me because they far exceed the dimensions of all other surviving buildings from the Ming dynasty, even ones of comparable rank.

Fu Xinian took a different approach. He first noticed that the depth of the Hall of Supreme Harmony, 33.33 meters, is already 4 meters greater than the depth of the roughly contemporaneous Sacrificial Hall and speculated that this figure thus reflected the original depth of the hall. He then examined the proportion between the width and the depth of the Sacrificial Hall (2.29:1) and, assuming that the Hall of Revering Heaven would have possessed approximately the same proportions, multiplied 33.33 by 2.29 to get 76.3 meters. This means that the Hall of Revering Heaven would have been about 10 meters wider and 4 meters deeper than the Sacrificial Hall, which seems quite reasonable. As for the building's height, it was probably around the same as it is today, 27 meters, but in order to compensate for the limitations of the timber frame, the platform was built up, resulting in a much taller structure overall than other buildings of this typology.

THE HALL OF SUPREME HARMONY AS A RECORD OF MING CONSTRUCTION

The Hall of Supreme Harmony, last rebuilt in 1695, is the only building within this long chain of destruction and reconstruction about which we have any reliable data regarding scale and structure. Given the high-Qing date of this hall, however, we would not expect to find any information pertaining to this building relevant to a study of Ming architecture. Yet a closer investigation into the structure of this hall reveals a hidden truth: the Hall of Supreme Harmony is, in many respects, an artifact of the late Ming period, if not earlier.

The Kangxi period reconstruction of the hall was accompanied by a detailed study entitled *Records on the Hall of Supreme Harmony (Taihe dian jishi)*, written by a certain Jiang Zao. The study provided in exhaustive detail guidelines for the hall's reconstruction, including

dimensions for the column spacing along the width and depth of the building, the heights of all the columns in the hall, specifications for the construction of the brackets, details about the ornamentation of the hall, and instructions about which types of materials to use.⁵⁴ Importantly, the record also explains that the measurements are based on a survey taken of the hall in the sixth year of the Kangxi reign (1667).⁵⁵ Because this predated the building's final destruction by fire in 1679, we know that the measurements must correspond at least to the late Ming Tianqi iteration of the hall in 1627.

In his investigation of the *Records on the Hall of Supreme Harmony*, the architectural historian Liu Chang noticed something unusual: the dimensions of the various aspects of the timber framework within the record are all conveyed in very specific fractional numbers.⁵⁶ For instance, the text explains that the width of the building was to be “18 *zhang*, 6 *chi*, 9 *cun*, and 5 *fen*” and that the depth was to be “10 *zhang*, 3 *chi*, 5 *cun*, and 9 *fen*.”⁵⁷ As Liu points out, some of these numbers come down to differences as small as 1.5 millimeters, an oddly high degree of precision for Chinese carpentry in the Qing dynasty, when a half *chi* (roughly 16 centimeters) was generally used as the standard for new constructions.⁵⁸ Liu determined that this had to do with the different systems of mensuration used in the Ming and the Qing dynasties. In the Ming dynasty, the standard foot (*yingzao chi*) was roughly equal to 31.7 centimeters, whereas in the Qing the standard foot was roughly equal to 32.1 centimeters. In other words, the text uses the Qing dynasty foot-measure to describe dimensions that had been laid out according to the Ming dynasty foot-measure, resulting in fractional numbers.⁵⁹

Remarkably, the dimensions recorded in Jiang Zao's text match up almost exactly to the actual dimensions of the Hall of Supreme Harmony. For instance, the measurement for the width of the hall (18 *zhang*, 6 *chi*, 9 *cun*, and 5 *fen*) listed in the record can be converted to 60.01 meters, while the actual width of the hall is 60.08 meters; the recorded dimensions for the depth (10 *zhang*, 3 *chi*, 5 *cun*, 9 *fen*) can be converted to 33.24 meters, while the actual depth is 33.33 meters; and the height of the interior columns (3 *zhang*, 9 *chi*, 5 *cun*) in the text can be converted to 12.68 meters, while the actual height of the columns is 12.7 meters.⁶⁰ These numbers confirm that the Qing dynasty Hall of Supreme Harmony was reconstructed according to the dimensions of the Ming dynasty Hall of the Imperial Absolute as documented in Jiang Zao's record.

The reader may find it strange that the master craftsmen chose to reconstruct the hall according to the overly complex Ming dimensions

documented in the *Records on the Hall of Supreme Harmony*, rather than building the hall from scratch according to the new Qing measurements. The most likely reason for this is that the dimensions were thought to possess the authentic power of the original hall and it was therefore necessary to maintain them. This decision underscores one of the most important claims of this paper: that each reconstruction of this hall alluded to the ideal of the vanished original. In the case of the Kangxi-era reconstruction of the Hall of Supreme Harmony, the “original” hall was probably actually the Jiajing era hall. I suspect that when the building was shrunken in the Jiajing reign, it was reduced to the size that it is today, filling in the one of the last major pieces of the puzzle in the architectural history of this building—when did the Hall of Supreme Harmony take its current form?

CONCLUSIONS

When the Yongle emperor first built his great Hall of Revering Heaven, it represented the epitome of Ming imperial construction. The hall was not simply enormous; it would have pushed the limits of the structural capabilities of a single-story timber frame building. While the building undoubtedly relied on the country’s most talented engineers and craftsmen to design and execute, its great size was ultimately only made possible by the massive *nanmu* timbers that Yongle transported from the southwest at great costs to the state. For reasons both practical and ideological, all reconstructions of the hall strove to be as close to the original as possible. Due to a shortage of large timber materials, however, the subsequent reconstructions could only ever imitate the original hall, never replicate it. Thus, the apparent continuities among the many reconstructions reflect an aspiration rather than a reality. By the mid Jiajing period, builders were forced to reduce the hall’s scale to the size that it is today. Although the final reconstruction occurred in 1695 during the Qing dynasty, because the hall was built according to at least Tianqi-era, if not also Jiajing-era, measurements, it in many respects can be considered a product of the late, or even mid, Ming dynasty.

NOTES

- 1 See, for instance, Laura Moro, ed, *Taihedian: The Hall of Supreme Harmony of the Forbidden City in Beijing* (Roma: Gangemi Editore, 2008); Zhang Xueqin and Liu Chang, “Kangxi sanshisi nian jian Taihedian damujiegou yanjiu,” *Gugong bowuyuan yuan kan* 4, 132 (2007), 28–47; Yu Zhuoyun, *Zhongguo gongdian jianzhu lunwenji* (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2001), 53–60; Wu Yumin and

Chen Zuping, “Beijing Gugong Taihe dian mugoujia tixi de gouzao tedian ji jingli fenxi,” in Shan Shiyuan and Yu Zhuoyun, eds., *Zhongguo Zijincheng xuehui lunwenji, di yi ji* (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 1997), 211–20.

- 2 *Ming Taizong shilu, juan* 236. As Li Xieping points out, on account of a lack of detailed records, it is impossible to know the extent of the damage caused by this fire. Li Xieping, “Cong Ming dai de ji ci chong jian kan Sandadian de bianhua,” in Yu Zhuoyun, ed., *Zijincheng jianzhu yanjiu yu baohu* (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 1995), 108 and 110.
- 3 Zhao Zhongnan, “Yongle monian de fan qiandu fengbo ji qi yi,” *Gugong bowuyuan yuan kan* 6, 188 (2016): 31–2. During Yongle’s usurpation of the throne, Yongle’s troops burned the Nanjing palaces with Jianwen inside. One of the main reasons why Yongle moved the capital to the north was likely to distance himself from this event. Since Yongle had lived in Beijing when he was the prince of Yan, the choice of Beijing, which was also the capital of the preceding Yuan dynasty, was obvious. For an introduction to this subject see Shi-shan Henry Tsai, *Perpetual Happiness: The Ming Emperor Yongle* (Seattle, WA, and London: University of Washington Press, 2001), 124–28 and Edward L. Dreyer, *Early Ming China: A Political History, 1355–1435* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1982), 182–7.
- 4 Cited in Pan Guxi, *Zhongguo gudai jianzhu shi, di si juan* (Beijing: Zhongguo jianzhu gongye chubanshe, 1999), 105. Originally from *Ming Taizong shilu, juan* 232.
- 5 Pan Guxi and Chen Wei, “Ming dai Nanjing gongdian yu Beijing gongdian de xingzhi guanxi,” in Shan Shiyuan and Yu Zhuoyun, eds., *Zhongguo Zijincheng xuehui lunwenji, di yi ji* (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 1997), 85. Originally from *Da Ming huidian, juan* 181.
- 6 Traditionally, the main halls in Chinese palaces were 11 bays across the front. Hongwu probably scaled down the size of the main hall in his capital to be in line with the rest of his “simple and unadorned” capital city. Yang Kuan, *Zhongguo Gudai ducheng zhidu yanjiu* (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 2003), 541. In traditional Chinese architecture, the size of the bay was not fixed, but rather changed according to the size of the building. The sizes of the bays at the Hall of Revering Heaven will be discussed further below.
- 7 The most detailed classical records of *nanmu* procurement in Ming dynasty are located in the *Sichuan Tongzhi* and the *Zunyi fuzhi*. The best secondary studies include Wang Ping, ed. *Mei cheng zai jiu: Jinsi nan zhi mei* (Beijing: Gugong chubanshe, 2012); Zhang Jinguang, “Huangmu caiban yu Mingdai shehui shengtai,” *Linye jingji* 9 (2010), 117–19; Yun Yan, “Zijincheng Yingjian caimu shilüe,” *Dongyue luncong* 27.6 (2006), 167–72; and Jiang Wuyuan, “Ming Qing chaoting Sichuan caimu yajiu,” in Yu Zhuoyun and Zhu Chengru, eds., *Zhongguo Zijincheng xuehui lunwenji, di er ji* (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2002), 238–9.
- 8 For more on these rebellions see Kenneth M. Swope, “To Catch a Tiger: The Suppression of the Yang Yinglong Miao Uprising (1587–1600) as a Case Study in Ming Military and Borderlands History,” in Kenneth R. Hall and Michael Aung Thwin, eds., *New Perspectives on the History and Historiography of Southeast Asia* (London: Routledge, 2011), 112–40.
- 9 For more on the architecture of the Sacrificial Hall see Li Qianlang, “Changling Ling’endian,” *Zijincheng* 5 (2009), 18–25 and Aurelia Campbell, “Chapter 21: Architecture of the Early Ming Court: A Preliminary Look,” in Craig Clunas, Jessica Harrison-Hall, and Yu-ping Luk, eds., *Ming China: Courts and Contacts, 1400–1450* (London: The British Museum Press, 2016), 189–216.

- 10 Li Xieping, “Cong Ming dai de ji ci chong jian kan Sandadian de bianhua,” in Yu Zhuoyun, ed., *Zijincheng jianzhu yanjiu yu baohu* (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 1995), 114.
- 11 *Shamu*, often called Chinese fir, is more precisely translated as *cunninghamia*. It was the second most important wood harvested by the Ming court for imperial construction projects. For more on this tree see Nicholas K. Menzies, “Forestry,” in Joseph Needham’s *Science and Civilisation in China, Volume 6: Biology and Biological Technology, Part III* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 574.
- 12 Jiang, “Ming Qing chaoting Sichuan caimu yajiu,” 118. Originally from *Ming Yingzong shilu*, *juan* 33.
- 13 Li, “Cong Mingdai de jici chongjian kan Sandadian de bianhua,” 114.
- 14 Li, “Cong Mingdai de jici chongjian kan Sandadian de bianhua,” 109. Originally from *Shizong shilu*, *juan* 446.
- 15 *Daoguang Zunyi fuzhi*, Muzheng, 1559.
- 16 This information is taken from an obituary written by Gui Youguang titled “The Obituary of the Grand Master for Thorough Council Censorate Vice Censor-in-Chief Li Gong” of Li Xianqing, the chief official who was sent to procure the timbers. Parts of this obituary are cited in Jiang, “Ming Qing chaoting Sichuan caimu yajiu,” 238–9.
- 17 For more on the architecture of the Imperial Ancestral Temple see Guo Huayu, “Beijing Taimiao Dadian jianzhu niandai tantao,” *Gudai jianzhu* 3.101 (2002), 49–55, and Yan Kai, “Beijing Taimiao jianzhu,” MA Thesis, Tianjin University, 2004.
- 18 Jiang, “Ming Qing chaoting Sichuan caimu yajiu,” 238–9.
- 19 *Ming Shizong shilu*, *juan* 447.
- 20 As will be discussed below, the dimensions 30 by 15 *zhang* must be exaggerated, because a timber building could not have been constructed that large.
- 21 *Ming Shizong shilu*, *juan* 447. I would like to thank Christian de Pee for his help with this translation. Christian also offered valuable comments and advice on a draft of this paper, which improved this study significantly.
- 22 *Ming Shenzong shilu*, *juan* 442.
- 23 *Daoguang Zunyi fuzhi*, Muzheng, 1558.
- 24 *Yongzheng Sichuan Tongzhi*, Muzheng, 2519. Notably, one of the aforementioned Miao rebellions was in full swing at this time and sources suggest that these timber extractions were one of the causes.
- 25 Shan Shiyuan, “Mingdai yingjian Beijing sige shiqi,” in Yu Zhuoyun, ed., *Zijincheng jianzhu yanjiu yu baohu* (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 1995), 8.
- 26 The process of obtaining *nanmu* timbers for the reconstruction of the hall began as early as the sixth year of the Kangxi reign (1667), when the hall had not yet been destroyed, but was in a state of disrepair. The emperor dispatched the Minister of Works Zhang Dedi to the southwest to collect *nanmu* timbers, but he was unsuccessful, outlining his enormous hardships in a detailed report to the throne (see *Yongzheng Sichuan Tongzhi*, Muzheng, 2542 for the report). Not long afterward, Kangxi issued an order to halt the collection of wood in the southwest (see *Yongzheng Sichuan Tongzhi*, Muzheng, 2502). After the hall was destroyed by fire caused by an earthquake, they had no choice but to rebuild it and again hoped to do so with *nan* timbers. Kangxi therefore sent another mission to the south to collect timbers. *Yongzheng Sichuan Tongzhi*, Muzheng, 2590 and 2599.

- 27 Cited in Jiang, “Ming Qing chaoting Sichuan caimu yajiu,” 241. Originally from Qinding Siku Quanshu *Huangchao Wenxian tong kao*.
- 28 The Song dynasty government construction manual was known as the “Treatise on Architectural Methods” (*Yingzao fashi*), compiled in 1103 by Li Jie. The Qing dynasty government construction manual was known as “Building Methods of the Board of Works” (*Gongbu gongcheng zuofa*), compiled in 1734 by Yinli and others. For an introduction to these and other Chinese sources on building see Klaas Ruitenbeek, *Carpentry and Building in Late Imperial China: A Study of the Fifteenth-Century Carpenter’s Manual* Lu Ban Jing (Leiden, New York, Köln: EJ Brill, 1993), 24–45.
- 29 Guo, “Guanyu Zijincheng Sandadian chongjian he bianhua de sikao,” 199 and Yan Kai, Wang Qiheng, and Cao Peng, “Beijing Ming Qing huangjia Sandadian zhi bijiao yanjiu,” *Shandong jianzhu gongcheng xueyuan xuebao* 21.2 (2006), 119.
- 30 Yan, Wang, and Cao, “Beijing Ming Qing huangjia Sandadian zhi bijiao yanjiu,” 119.
- 31 Li Ronggao, *Yunnan linye wenhua beike* (Baoshan shi: Dehong minzu chubanshe, 2004), 19.
- 32 For more on the reconstruction process of the Grand Shrine at Ise see Cassandra Adams, “Japan’s Ise Shrine and Its Thirteen-Hundred-Year-Old Reconstruction Tradition,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 52, 1 (1998): 49–60 and William Coaldrake, *Architecture and Authority in Japan* (London and New York: Routledge Press, 1996), 16–51.
- 33 The Great Buddha Hall was first constructed in the eighth century by Emperor Shōmu. Following destruction by fire caused by a civil war, it was reconstructed in the eleventh century by the great Buddhist monk Chōgen. The present hall, completed in 1707 during the Meiji period, is the hall’s fourth reconstruction. At 47 meters high, 57 meters deep, and 52 meters wide, it is the largest timber-framed building in the world, though it would have been much larger in the past, particularly after Chōgen’s reconstruction. For more on this subject see Coaldrake, *Architecture and Authority in Japan*, 70–80 and 243–9 and Arata Isozaki, *Japan-ness in Architecture*, Sabu Kohso, trans. and David Stewart, ed. (Cambridge, MA and London, England: The MIT Press, 2011), 12–24. I would like to thank Lala Zuo for bringing the similarities between the Great Buddha Hall and the Hall of Supreme Harmony to my attention.
- 34 The Hall of Supreme Harmony represents the building where the people live, the Sacrificial Hall is the building in which the dead dwell in the tomb, and the front hall of the Imperial Ancestral Temple is the place where the spirits of the dead reside temporarily when they receive sacrifices. Yan, Wang, and Cao, “Beijing Ming Qing huangjia Sandadian zhi bijiao yanjiu,” 121.
- 35 Yan, Wang, and Cao, “Beijing Ming Qing huangjia Sandadian zhi bijiao yanjiu,” 119.
- 36 Wang Xiaoping, *Zhongguo gudai jianzhu shuyuan cidian* (Beijing: Wenhua chubanshe, 2006), 251–2.
- 37 Yan, Wang, and Cao, “Beijing Ming Qing huangjia Sandadian zhi bijiao yanjiu,” 119. Li Qianlang writes that the columns are 14.3 tall. Li, “Changling Ling’endian,” 19.
- 38 Fu Xinian, *Zhongguo gudai chengshi guihua, jianzhu qun buji ji jianzhu sheji fangfa yanjiu (shangce)* (Beijing: Zhongguo jianzhu gongye chubanshe, 2001), 145.

- 39 Yan, Wang, and Cao, “Beijing Ming Qing huangjia Sandadian zhi bijiao yanjiu,” 119.
- 40 It is possible that before the hall was expanded to 11 bays there were only 54 pillars inside the hall. The 34 that supported the main roof frame would have remained the same, however.
- 41 Yan, Wang, and Cao, “Beijing Ming Qing huangjia Sandadian zhi bijiao yanjiu,” 119.
- 42 Guo, “Beijing Taimiao dadian jianzao niandai tantao,” 53.
- 43 Yan, Wang, and Cao, “Beijing Ming Qing huangjia Sandadian zhi bijiao yanjiu,” 119.
- 44 Guo Qinghua, “Guanyu Zijincheng Sandadian chongjian he bianhua de sikao,” in Wang Guixiang and He Congrong, eds., *Zhongguo jianzhu shilun huikan, di jiu ji* (Beijing: Qinghua daxue chubanshe, 2014), 202.
- 45 Guo, “Guanyu Zijincheng Sandadian chongjian he bianhua de sikao,” 199, and Yan, Wang, and Cao, “Beijing Ming Qing huangjia Sandadian zhi bijiao yanjiu,” 119.
- 46 Yan, Wang, and Cao, “Beijing Ming Qing huangjia Sandadian zhi bijiao yanjiu,” 119.
- 47 A recent analysis of the Hall of Supreme Harmony revealed that, like the *shan* timbers in the Hall of the Imperial Absolute, the pine was too thin to form large columns and beams out of individual trunks. Therefore, the “wrapped-rim” method was also employed in the columns of the Hall of Supreme Harmony. The team that surveyed the hall also uncovered exactly how these composite columns were created. First, pieces of wood, hewn into a trapezoidal section, were affixed to the central core with nails and held together with metal bands. The columns were then covered with a protective layer containing a mixture of ground brick, pigs’ blood, and tung-tree oil. Strips of hemp were pasted on top of this base until they formed a thickness of between 5.5 and 10 millimeters. Finally, the columns were painted over with lacquer. This was all evidently done to obscure the fact that the columns were fabricated with many different parts. Moro, ed. *Taihedian: The Hall of Supreme Harmony of the Forbidden City in Beijing*, 82. It is important to mention that only mortise and tenon joinery would have been used in the Ming reconstructions of the hall, not metal, so the method of constructing the columns would have differed. Yu, *Zhongguo gudian jianzhu lunwen ji*, 49.
- 48 Wu Cong, “Qinghai Ledu Qutansi jianzhu yanjiu,” MA thesis, Tianjin University, 1994, 23, and Li Yue, Liu Chang, Wang Shiwei, Sun Chuang, and Lei Yong, “Qinghai Ledu Qutan si Longguo dian damu jiegou yanjiu buyi,” *Gugong bowuguan yuankan* 4.150 (2010), 64. Li et al. provide the column heights in *chi*.
- 49 Fu, *Zhongguo gudai chengshi guihua, jianzhu qun buju ji jianzhu sheji fangfa yanjiu*, 149.
- 50 Li Guangliang and Li Jianwen, “Zhongguo duyong de zhenxi shuzhong: zhennan,” in Wang Ping, ed., *Mei cheng zai jiu: Jinsi nan zhi mei* (Beijing: Gugong chubanshe, 2012), 239.
- 51 Li uses the Ming dynasty measurement of 1 *zhang* = to 3.17 meters. Li Xieping, “Yongle yingjian Beijing gongdian tansuo,” in Yu Zhouyun and Zhu Chengru, eds., *Zhongguo Zijincheng xuehui lunwenji, di er ji* (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2002), 114.
- 52 My main problem with Lin’s methodology is that he relies mostly on textual descriptions, which were surely either exaggerated or otherwise inaccurate. Lin Zhe, “Yongle shiqi Beijing Zijincheng Fengtiandian pingmian xingzhi kaolue,” *Gu*

jian yuanlin jishu 1 (2007), 55.

- 53 Guo, “Guanyu Zijincheng Sandadian chongjian he bianhua de sikao,” 206–7.
- 54 For more in this text in Chinese see Zhang Xueqin and Liu Chang, “Kangxi sanshisi nian jian Taihedian damujiegou yanjiu,” *Gugong bowuyuan yuan kan* 4.132 (2007), 31 and for English see Liu Chang, *The Forbidden City* (Beijing: Qinghua University Press, 2012), 119.
- 55 Zhang and Liu, “Kangxi sanshisi nian jian Taihedian damujiegou yanjiu,” 31.
- 56 Liu, *The Forbidden City*, 119.
- 57 Liu, *The Forbidden City*, 119.
- 58 Liu, *The Forbidden City*, 120.
- 59 Liu, *The Forbidden City*, 120.
- 60 Width: 18 *zhang*, 6 *chi*, 9 *cun*, 5 *fen*; $(18 \times 3.21 \text{ meters}) + (6 \times .321 \text{ meters}) + (9 \times .0321 \text{ meters}) + (5 \times .00321 \text{ meters})$; $57.78 + 1.926 + .2889 + .01605 = 60.01$ meters. Depth: 10 *zhang*, 3 *chi*, 5 *cun*, 9 *fen*; $(10 \times 3.21 \text{ meters}) + (3 \times .321 \text{ meters}) + (5 \times .0321 \text{ meters}) + (5 \times .00321 \text{ meters})$; $32.1 + .962 + .1605 + .01605 = 33.24$. Height of interior columns: 3 *zhang*, 9 *chi*, 5 *cun*; $(3 \times 3.21 \text{ meters}) + (9 \times .321 \text{ meters}) + (5 \times .0321 \text{ meters})$; $9.63 + 2.889 + .1605 = 12.68$. See Zhang and Liu, “Kangxi sanshisi nian jian Taihedian damujiegou yanjiu,” 31 for these and many other measurements.

CHAPTER 12

THE CONFUCIAN IDEAL FRIEND



Ying Zhang

To what extent did Confucianism, the dominant ideology in the Ming, actually inspire people's behavior in everyday life? Although many of the Confucian moral ideals sound lofty, idealistic, and impractical to us today, many literati actually aspired to live by them, exhibiting extraordinary compassion and resolve. Take friendship, one of the Confucian Five Cardinal Relations, as an example. The philosopher Roger A. Ames explains the Confucian gentleman as a friend in this way:

Unlike the English word friend, ['friend'] for Confucius cannot be used loosely for mere acquaintances or strangers, or as a mark of goodwill or kindly condescension . . . 'Friend' in classical Chinese is resolutely hierarchical—*an occasion to grow personally*—and can only be assigned to the *ren* relationship in which one is able express deference to another.¹

The moral subject's elevation is realized by "*seeking spiritual growth* in the community of other persons."² In this chapter, through a case study of literati friendship in the Ming, we will explore how the rich meanings of the concept of "trustworthiness" (*xin*), the foundation of the Confucian male friendship, shaped literati actions and relations in that world on both individual and collective levels. We will also see that

Confucian ethical ideals are concerned with everyday emotions and practical needs. These mundane things in turn inspire the literati's intellectual and spiritual explorations.

It is important to keep in mind that Ming literati often wrote about their friendships after longstanding Confucian models.³ Such texts are performative rather than documentary; they participated in the making of friendship and hence served particular social, cultural, and political agendas. The historian should not take them at face value, but can turn this problem into an analytical advantage by showing how literati narrative strategy *per se* was part of Confucian friendship making.

ZHU ZHUWEN AND HIS TRAVEL DIARY

Our study of a circle of friends begins with the literatus Zhu Zuwen (d. 1628). In Zhu's hometown, the city of Suzhou, resided some of the most renowned political and cultural figures of the Ming empire. There, Zhu was an insignificant man, even though his family possessed a minor hereditary title.⁴ We know about him mainly because he participated in the efforts to support Zhou Shunchang (d. 1626), an official who was arrested, imprisoned, and then murdered during the persecution of Donglin-identified figures by the eunuch faction in 1625–26.⁵ Zhu traveled from Suzhou to Beijing with Zhou and shuttled between the capital and various places in Hebei (near Beijing) on Zhou's behalf. For this reason, he has earned a mention in Zhou's biography in the official history of the Ming dynasty:

Upon Zhou Shunchang's arrest, [Zhu Zuwen] traveled secretly to the capital, where he helped arrange for Zhou's food and medicine. Then an embezzlement charge was made and speedy payment demanded. Zhu went to visit various sympathizers to borrow money. After Zhou's coffin returned [to Suzhou], Zhu died from illness caused by deep sorrow.⁶

This type of short biography abounds in official historiographies. It highlights the main moral accomplishment of an otherwise insignificant person, covering his deeds economically to substantiate a categorically proper moral judgment. However, thanks to Zhu's travel diary, *Daily Records of My Trip to the North* (*Beixing ripu*, *Daily Records* hereafter), we can appreciate the Confucian exemplars in such biographies not only as an historical model but in its practicality as well.

In the diary, Zhu documented the time when he was involved in helping Zhou Shunchang—his interactions with Zhou immediately after his arrest, the trip he made to and in the north, and his return journey

after Zhou died in the imperial prison. This material has been read mainly for “facts” of the political integrity and solidarity of the “good men” in late-Ming factionalism.⁷ What has been overlooked is that the contents of the diary are not as coherent or idealized as one would assume. The author has left with us a complex documentation of actions and emotions. A careful examination of the circulation of this diary also destabilizes the assumption that this is a formulaic narrative. Zhu composed a preface (dated the fifth month of 1626)⁸ and showed the manuscript to some famous officials and literati friends. He did not live long enough to see the text published (1629) but died almost immediately after the new emperor was enthroned (1627) and poised to dismantle the eunuch faction. The posthumously published material, especially the paratext, reads very differently from the diary itself, further revealing the rich texture of a Confucian friendship.

BECOMING FRIENDS

Zhu Zuwen and Zhou Shunchang’s friendship grew out of their shared commitment to filial piety. The two men were both Suzhou natives but they belonged to different social classes. Zhu approached Zhou to borrow the latter’s influence in order to expedite the petition for an imperial chastity award for his widowed mother. Zhou enthusiastically helped publicize her chaste deeds. He reached out to the higher levels of local officials and urged their intervention.⁹ Given that it had become incredibly time-consuming for families of chaste women to obtain the imperial chastity award due to bureaucratic hurdles, Zhu had good reasons to believe Zhou truly appreciated a filial son’s desire to fulfill his duty of immortalizing the virtuous mother.¹⁰ At this point, however, their difference in status dictated that the nature of the relationship was patronage.

The turning point in their relationship from that of patronage to friendship came as the eunuch-dominated court ordered Zhou’s arrest in the spring of 1626. Zhu’s role changed. He records the subtle change in his diary:

In terms of status I am too inferior. Although Mr. Zhou generously extended friendship, I observed the norms and did not cross the boundary, never attempting to visit him except on major holidays. I began to frequently stop by only after Mr. Zhou was stripped of his official status. His reaction seemed to suggest that he saw me as a trustworthy person who did not seek to connect with the powerful but remained as faithful as before. This is exactly how I formed a friendship with Mr. Zhou.¹¹

Soon, Zhou made a formal request to Zhu as a friend, by asking Zhu to help him fulfill an important filial duty: “My only concern is that I have not formally buried my parents. I would be worried even in the underworld if this is not taken care of.”¹²

The growth of Zhu and Zhou’s friendship also depended on a similar understanding of fatherly responsibilities. Sons were expected to travel with and take care of their fathers in the hard times. The filial deeds of the sons of some recent Donglin martyrs were well known among supporters. When it became clear that Zhou Shunchang would be transferred to Beijing to be “tried” and likely face the same kind of ordeal, it was decided that his son, Zhou Maolan, would travel with him and Zhu to Beijing. However, a mere two days after their departure, as the gravity of this case further crystalized, Zhou changed his mind. He ordered his son to return to Suzhou immediately. The tearful son consulted Zhu. Zhu understood Zhou’s concerns as a father and helped persuade Maolan to reconsider his filial priorities. He discussed the meaning of filial piety with the young man.

I said: “Your father has given this a lot of thought. One should not disobey his father’s wish. This is an unusual time. Your mother has been devastated. If you return and patiently console your mother, you will fulfill your filial duties.” Eventually I was able to persuade him to go back [to Suzhou]. (A few days later) early in the fourth month, some evil men presented a false imperial edict that ordered the Zhou family property confiscated. The Zhou household was shattered. Mr. Zhou’s wife almost committed suicide. Had [Maolan] not been with her, she would have died. I thought his return to hometown was a Heavenly blessing.¹³

Leaving Zhu alone in his father’s company, Maolan’s departure complicated Zhu’s mission.¹⁴ Since it was expected that Zhou’s own son should travel as messenger to Zhou’s friends, in the absence of Maolan, Zhu would need to convince those people that he should be trusted. Further, Zhou’s friends might also question why his own son failed to fulfill his filial duty, which could seriously undermine the Zhou family’s moral image. To avoid leaving such an impression, in the introductory letter for Zhu Zuwen to Sun Qifeng (1584–1675), a literatus supporter in Hebei, Zhou wrote: “My young son started off with me, but fell ill and became a burden. I insisted that he go home. Now the only person I can rely on is Zhu Zuwen, a close friend.”¹⁵ Zhu knew the contents of all the letters he delivered to Zhou’s longtime friends. His acquiescence helped protect the filial reputation of the Zhou family.

In addition to sharing Zhou’s filial commitment and sympathizing with his stance as a father, Zhu also appreciated Zhou’s understanding of his duty as a loyal official. Since Zhou’s arrest, friends and supporters in Suzhou had been debating whether Zhou should go to Beijing or not.

A few officials had been tortured to death in prison. A similar fate awaited Zhou. If he had to die, why not commit suicide, which could spare him torture and execution but still make him a hero? Zhou decided that his suicide would ignite the already inflammatory tension between the eunuch power and outraged locals of Suzhou, leading to the deaths of more people.¹⁶ Zhu had faith in his friend's judgment, even though it meant he himself must make the dangerous trip.

Examples of ideal friendship in history appear as simple altruism to modern eyes. *Daily Records* offers us an opportunity to problematize this view. The ideal Confucian friendship goes far beyond blind self-sacrifice; it is formed on the friends' shared understanding of how to handle everyday practical matters in the most considerate manner. Further, like the many stories of committed friendship that filled the pages of literati literature and historiography, this diary illuminates a crucial dimension of trustworthiness: friendship-making efforts transcend life and death.

Zhu Zuwen was concerned about the possibility of failing to fulfill ritual responsibilities in the event of Zhou Shunchang's death. He began to prepare the logistics in anticipation of his friend's death as soon as they set off.

[I] did not think Mr. Zhou was likely to return alive. Since I could not help much otherwise, once we have arrived in the capital, I should first purchase a coffin. In case the worst happens, at least I could personally rest his body in the coffin in order to fulfill my responsibility as a friend and offer the Zhou family some condolence. This was my plan when I set off.¹⁷

The diary mentions this concern many times. For instance, when, in order to raise funds—to pay off the “embezzled money” imposed on Zhou by the persecutors—Zhu had to travel away from Beijing for a few days, he never forgot to arrange for someone else to prepare for collecting Zhou's body.¹⁸ As meticulous and optimistic as Zhu attempted to be, however, the worst indeed happened. Not only did Zhou die, but, when his body was placed in the coffin, an important moment of mourning, only one servant was present; Zhu was traveling in Hebei on Zhou's behalf. The sad condition of Zhou's body was beyond their wildest imagination and caused another problem: they had purchased a coffin and funerary clothes in advance. But the clothes could not fit Zhou's corpse due to the severe damages it had sustained in prison and simply lay unused in the coffin next to Zhou's body.¹⁹ When learning these details, Zhu records, he was utterly devastated.

This was only the beginning of Zhu's distress. News of Zhou's death

arrived in a small village, Jiangcun, where Zhu had fallen ill due to fatigue and stress in his effort to raise money to save Zhou.²⁰ Upset about missing the moment of resting his friend's body in the coffin, Zhu was determined to perform "attending to the coffin" (*husang*).²¹ He rushed back to Beijing, only to find out that those who were transporting Zhou's coffin southward had already departed. Heavy rain, flooding, and the obligation of stopping by at various places along the way to settle loans prevented him from catching up with the boat that carried the coffin. Zhu desperately tried to accompany the coffin for at least a small part of the return journey. But again and again, he reached a port on the Grand Canal only to find out that he had once again just missed the boat that carried the coffin. At one point, extremely frustrated, Zhu lamented: "Why does Heaven create so many hurdles!"²²

The failure to perform the rituals of resting his friend's body and guarding the coffin on its way back home upset Zhu so much that it almost felt as if this had prevented him from becoming Zhou's true friend:

Alas! I had hoped Mr. Zhou would be exempted from death. But after we embarked on the trip, I realized that he would likely die. Then I decided that I should travel with him if only to be able to personally put his body into the coffin—I hoped to do this in order to repay Mr. Zhou [for his friendship] and offer condolences to his family. I did not make this trip to collect funds! Now I left only [one servant, Gu Xuan,] to take care of Mr. Zhou's body. This whole thing ended so terribly wrong; it betrayed my initial intentions completely. Why did I make this trip? This pains me so much.²³

Everything Zhu did contributed to making a true friend. But literati tended to place special emphasis on the ritual aspect, for good reasons. Rituals served as a proper way of expressing emotions. Although the diary describes in great detail the hardships endured by Zhu as he tried to hide from the secret police and making exhausting trips to raise funds, he records the strongest emotions where he recalls the days after Zhou's death, because he had failed to perform the rituals of friendship. One could argue that by recording his deep regret and sorrow, Zhu's emotions found another legitimate place in the Confucian ethical structure: even though he was deprived of the opportunity to perform at the proper moment an important ritual of friendship, writing presented another ritual opportunity. Further, as Zhu's health deteriorated after the trip, he expressed a strong sense of urgency in fulfilling responsibilities such as paying off the loans borrowed for Zhou, securing a sustainable source of livelihood for Zhou's widow and education for his children, and petitioning the new emperor to restore the status and reputation of the Zhou family.²⁴ These met both the practical and the emotional needs

of the mourning ones.

Thus “becoming friends” is a long process across life and death, involving strenuous and persistent endeavors on moral, intellectual, spiritual, and social levels. This is consistent with the Confucian understanding of the moral subject as a “human becoming.”²⁵ The friend strives to actualize his responsibilities in other roles as a filial son, caring father, and loyal subject. Additionally, precisely because the ideal and the practical are inseparable and indistinguishable, this friend-making process entails constant self-reflection and spiritual growth.

A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Daily Records reflects the late-Ming surge of literati interest in autobiographical writing, especially spiritual autobiography.²⁶ Throughout the diary, Zhu does not appear as a perfect individual but as a friend *in the making*. Zhu’s account of how he took up the task of traveling with Zhou to Beijing is much less romantic than one would expect. He did not volunteer himself until someone else had done so but turned out to be physically unfit for the mission.²⁷ Zhu also admits that he was not unwavering even after he volunteered.

My wife kept saying: “If Mr. Zhou went [to Beijing] he would definitely die, and his death would definitely be horrific. Why not die in the hometown but willingly head for a horrific death?” I felt the impact of her words; they lingered in my mind. I could not sleep. Next day I visited the Guandi temple for divination. First I asked about the idea that Mr. Zhou should commit suicide in Suzhou. The divination result suggested that god wanted him to make the trip [to Beijing]. Then I inquired about my decision to travel with him. The message I received was alarming. However, the situation had already unfolded in such a way that it would be unrighteous if I changed my mind at this point. So I told myself: “Sima [Guang] once said, ‘If Heaven intends to support the Song dynasty, one should not worry about the risk.’ If Heaven pities me, my life will not be endangered. It is wrong not to do the right thing just to avoid a potential disaster.” After that I stopped worrying.²⁸

The diary narrates, in an ordinary literatus’s language, how Zhu experienced and interpreted his spiritual growth to becoming a true friend. Zhu represented the average men of his class in the Ming. They studied Confucian classics for examinations, but they did not have significant intellectual insights or a powerful position to influence politics. Their spiritual world was complex: they drew inspirations from Confucian classics and historiography and chose to reflect on their spiritual growth in Confucian terms, even though they also sought divination and prayed to popular gods and deities with or without devotion.²⁹

Zhu's diary exhibits a deepening understanding of trustworthiness. He realized that blunt display of courage was superficial; a true friend should act with prudence and good judgment. For instance, safety became his primary concern because any mistake could jeopardize Zhou Shunchang's already slim chance of survival. He wanted to remain in the shadow. This would allow his mission—including raising funds, seeking political support, passing on information, and so on—to be hidden from the sight of the eunuch faction and the secret police. When choosing accommodations, he tried to avoid attention and minimize the possibility of bringing troubles to local connections.³⁰ When he arrived in a Beijing suburb, he stayed with a longtime personal friend, Jiang Shiheng. An extremely warm man, Jiang repeatedly got up at night to check on Zhu. This disturbed his whole household. Although Zhu tried to stop him, Jiang did not fully understand. His house became too noticeable. Zhu consulted other friends about safer, quieter hideouts and learned there was a Buddhist monastery. Still feeling uncertain, Zhu visited a Guandi temple and prayed. Here, he received a divination stick with a positive message regarding the new accommodation.³¹

Zhu did not naturally know how to be an ideal friend. When he left Suzhou, he had a very romantic—and simple—idea about it: risking his life to collect the body of the deceased friend and rest it in the coffin. His naïveté was understandable because the most famous examples of ideal friendship recorded in the official histories all did this.³² Soon, Zhu learned that trustworthiness was much more complex. In addition to considerateness and good judgment, following through on one's commitment to an undertaking also meant he had to deal with all kinds of people and scenarios and to handle mundane matters such as money.

Zhu Zuwen went to Wuqiao and Dingxing in Hebei a few times to raise funds to pay back the “embezzled money” imposed on Zhou. The Donglin sympathizers in this region, Fan Jingwen (1587–1644) (in Wuqiao) and Lu Shanji (1575–1636) (in Dingxing), as well as Sun Qifeng in Rongcheng (25 *li* from Dingxing), had provided crucial support to other Donglin families in the previous year.

During his first visit to Hebei, Zhu Zuwen carried two introductory letters from Zhou Shunchang. To Lu Shanji, Zhu was introduced as Zhou's brother-in-law so that he could be seen as Zhou's close family member and as trustworthy.³³ Zhou's introductory letter to Fan Jingwen, who lived in temporary retirement in Wuqiao, 550 *li* from Dingxing, had also referred to Zhu as his brother-in-law.³⁴ Later, touched by Fan's sincerity and integrity, Zhu decided to reveal voluntarily that he was not Zhou's brother-in-law. Instead of immediately acknowledging Zhu as Zhou's friend, Fan asked him some

questions. First, he inquired about the worthy men in Suzhou. Zhu's answers did not contradict what Fan had previously learned from Zhou himself. They showed that Zhu not only came from Zhou's hometown but also shared similar social and political views. Next, Fan asked: "You have passed Dingxing a few times. There is a shrine dedicated to Yang [Jisheng]. Zhang [Fei's] old residence is there, too. Have you paid a visit?" Zhu felt fortunate that he could give Fan a positive, honest answer to the question; he had indeed prayed for Zhou's safe return at those two sites.³⁵ When he prayed there, he did not foresee that this would help confirm his status as Zhou's friend. To him, this again proved the efficacy of Confucian moral pursuits. After these "tests," Fan bowed to Zhu in formal recognition of him as Zhou's true friend: "We both are Mr. Zhou's friends, but you alone have labored for his rescue. I must bow to you again."³⁶

Fan and Zhu continued to inspire each other, even after Zhu's trip ended. In a letter, Fan called Zhu and Zhou's friendship a "life-and-death friendship" (*shengsi zhi jiao*):³⁷

When I read [Fan Ye's] book, his documentation of what Guo Liang did for Li Gu, Zhu Zhen for Chen Fan and Zhi Xi for Kong Rong always stimulates my imagination and admiration. I used to think that there are no such men in our time. I was surprised to see them in you. We live in this time of moral decline. You have single-handedly sustained the way of friendship. The spirit of noble friendship still persists in this world. This is more important than [resting the deceased friend's body in the coffin] to repay his friendship.³⁸

Interestingly, the three cases mentioned in Fan's letter became legendary examples of ideal friendship all because a devoted friend, undeterred by political risks, took care of his dead friend's corpse. Fan's comparison of Zhu to these three historical figures was not an error. On the contrary, it conveyed the highest praise one could give to a Confucian friend. It was perfect for this occasion: it addressed Zhu's regret and disappointment, pointing out that Zhu had embodied true friendship even though he was not able to replicate the deeds of those historical figures. In the next few months, Fan followed through on his promise of taking care of the previous loan. He agreed with Zhu's suggestion and raised money to help purchase some property for the Zhou family. Zhu's persistence had played an important role in making this happen. In turn, Fan's commitment to this effort made this a rewarding experience for Zhu.³⁹

Zhu thus experienced spiritual growth both as an individual and as a member of a community of friends. The various interpretations of trustworthiness in the Confucian classics—abiding by one's verbal commitments thoroughly, applying good judgment and caution, and sincerity—are all present in his travel diary.⁴⁰ Importantly, as we will see

more below, this very self-reflective text about friendship does not differentiate between interiority and exteriority, or between the spiritual and the practical.

MONEY AND EMOTIONS

The eunuch faction arrested some Donglin officials on corruption charges. They tortured these men and demanded that they “return” a large amount of “embezzled money.” Thus fundraising for Zhou Shunchang occupied much of Zhu’s time during the entire trip. At the time, the eunuch propaganda machine disseminated materials to sway public opinion. The Donglin’s other rivals seized upon the opportunity to reinforce their own factionalist messages. Many people could not determine whether the attacks on the Donglin were as unjustified as the Donglin sympathizers had claimed. Thus it became even more important for the Donglin officials to maintain their good moral image.⁴¹ Supporters like Zhu faced the same challenge. At the first fundraising meeting with Zhou’s other Suzhou supporters, Zhu described Zhou’s noble character and, prompted by their questions, explained the poverty of Zhou’s family and its lack of connections with rich locals.⁴² Zhu’s diary reveals his worry throughout the trip that anything less than meticulous documentation and thorough explanation of the flow of funds would put his identity as a friend in question.

The diary mentions but does not spend much ink on the sources of the largest sums of the funds raised for Zhou. The most careful account concerns a mere 500 taels of silver, about one-sixth of the total amount. This small portion of the funds, however, tells a complex but illuminating story about friendship making. In Dingxing, Lu Shanji helped Zhu raise 300 taels. The diary lists the various sources of this pool of money:

20, donation, the Dingxing magistrate

50, donation, Luo Wanxiang, Lu’s in-law (Lu insisted on considering this as a loan)

80, loan, a relative of Sun Qifeng

100, loan, a merchant’s mother (monthly interest 2%)

50, donation, previously collected for Wei Dazhong’s family after

30, donation, the official Mao Yuanyi, received later via Lu⁴³

Zhu asked Lu to send a capable servant with him to Beijing. This was a precautionary move, out of safety concerns and, more importantly, to ensure transparency and avoid miscommunication.⁴⁴

A week later, Zhou Shunchang smuggled out a short note from his prison cell, instructing Zhu to visit Fan Jingwen in Wuqiao. Beating the summer heat and rain, Zhu rushed from Beijing to Dingxing (200 *li*, one day) and then to Wuqiao (550 *li*, four days). Fan managed to get a local man surnamed Zhao to pledge a loan of 300 taels. As a measure of caution, Fan told Zhu to return to Dingxing and wait for the money at Lu's home. So Zhu returned to Dingxing. There he learned that only 200 taels had arrived from Wuqiao—Zhao had changed his mind; Fan had to borrow 200 taels from two other debtors.

The mission exhausted Zhu. He collapsed in Dingxing under fatigue and stress. Just as he was recovering and getting ready to head back to Beijing, news arrived that Zhou Shunchang had died in prison. All of a sudden, Zhu's job was reversed: he must promptly and properly return the money he had collected so far. He immediately decided that the thirty taels donated by Mao Yuanyi should be given to Lu. In addition, he thought of other venues to return the remaining sum to Lu, but he had to hurry in order to catch up with the boat carrying Zhou's corpse. He left Lu a debt note of 250 taels.

Zhu had good reasons for insisting on writing the debt note. There had been an incident surrounding a silver ingot (fifty taels). When Zhu received news of his friend's death and tried to settle some debts before rushing to the capital from Dingxing, Lu Shanji inquired if there was anything left from the previous funds he had helped raise. Zhu replied that there might be a silver ingot in a friend's deposit, but he did not know for certain. Lu asked the same question three times that day, and Zhu gave the same answer. Upon arriving in Beijing, Zhu learned that when his friend told Zhou Shunchang's servant to withdraw the money from his deposit, Lu's servant overheard the conversation and mistook it as "unused money."⁴⁵ He reported this to his master. It turned out that there was indeed a silver ingot, but it had been put aside for Zhou's personal use at the beginning of the trip and had nothing to do with the money raised by Lu.⁴⁶

This incident reinforced Zhu's belief that "suspicion arises easily

around money. One should not get involved [in money-related matters] lightly.”⁴⁷ In fact, at their very first meeting, Zhu was alerted by Lu’s questioning.

Lu looked worried and asked: “Would Mr. Zhou mind if the money is not a donation (but a loan)?” I replied: “If Mr. Zhou minded, we would never be able to pay off the charged amount. Mr. Zhou’s family will definitely take care of this. Can I leave you a debt note? If Mr. Zhou’s life is saved, money will definitely come from our hometown to pay off the debt. If unfortunately Mr. Zhou dies, I will still be around and will not let you down.” Mr. Lu smiled: “I just had to ask about the specifics. There is no need to write a debt note.”⁴⁸

This conversation and some other incidents made Zhu more careful when he interacted with Lu. But handling money was unavoidable. Therefore, Zhu realized the importance of documenting how the money was spent or transferred, which explains the prominence of the theme of money in his diary. He also repeatedly mentioned that one debt note.

Zhu had a very different experience with Fan Jingwen. After Zhou Shunchang died, when Zhu returned to Fan the loan borrowed through him, Fan wanted to donate the money. Zhu did not want to cause Fan any more financial burden. He turned down the offer. When Fan insisted on donating, Zhu found another excuse to persuade him to give up on the thought: “It would be rude for me to refuse to take it. However, two hundred taels is not a small sum. It might attract unwanted attention during my long trip back.”⁴⁹ Eventually, Zhu returned this loan, thereby fulfilling his duty as a true friend of Zhou Shunchang. Also, by turning down Fan’s offer, he also gave Fan and himself more time to consider the best way to help the Zhou family. Zhu tried to fulfill his responsibilities as a friend by handling money scrupulously. This explains why he seemed less anxious when soliciting help from Fan to acquire a sustainable source of income for the Zhou family—land. A land transaction would not require Zhu to handle silver himself. The benefits would directly go to the Zhous. The correspondence between Zhu and Fan after the trip indicates that they worked closely together to make sound long-term financial and educational plans for Zhou’s sons.⁵⁰ Again, trustworthiness means much more than self-sacrifice. The true friend demonstrates sincerity, considerateness, and good judgment when dealing with mundane things such as financial matters.

RECORDS OF HONORABLE INTENTIONS

In contrast to Fan Jingwen, the image of Lu Shanji in Zhu’s diary is not so ideal. The reader cannot help but notice the implicit comparison

where Zhu honestly reports that Lu's servants accepted some payment—on behalf of Lu—while Fan refused to do so.⁵¹ Still, Zhu profusely praised Lu's effort to secure loans and help with fundraising. In the diary and elsewhere, he continued to stress Lu's dedication to the friendship with Zhou. This "discrepancy" should not be interpreted as evidence of literati hypocrisy. As we shall see, these men would work on communication patiently until they had attended to the unaddressed concerns and difficult feelings. This process could take a long time and involve a circle of friends and their sons, even after some of them had died.

No one, including Zhu, would deny that Lu Shanji had intended to help the Zhous. Good intention was a key element of trustworthiness, but the friends had to consider the specific circumstances and assess carefully, in each case, how to materialize and appreciate good intentions. For instance, Zhu understood that both donations and loans reflected friends' desire to help and should not be taken lightly. In the meantime, Zhu had to separate donations from loans and make sure to repay the latter, a difficult task due to the fluid boundaries between the two in a volatile situation. He stressed the difference between these two sources of financial assistance so as not to elevate some of Zhou's friends above others. The circulation of his travel diary reveals that this act was part of the mechanism of negotiating trustworthiness.

Zhu Zuwen completed the travel diary upon returning to Suzhou. *Daily Records*, published posthumously in 1629, included the diary and Zhu's own preface as well as new prefaces, letters from friends after the trip, and his son's postscript. Zhu's own preface frames the diary as an honest documentation of many individuals—Zhou Shunchang's character and integrity, the bravery of the Suzhou natives residing in Beijing, the righteousness of the literati in Hebei (including the Lu family), anonymous sympathizers who donated money, and the loyalty of Zhou's servants. For Zhu, the value of this diary lies not only in keeping a record of these men's exemplary deeds but also in providing firsthand information rarely known among the reading public.⁵² At the end of the preface, Zhu again expresses deep regret about failing to help rest Zhou's body in the coffin, noting that publishing the diary would in no way relieve him of the regret.⁵³

The last section of the main body of Zhu's diary summarizes his trip and the literati's broader efforts to support the Zhous. It actually functions as a postscript and, again, serves important documentary purposes. In particular, Zhu treats money-related questions seriously. He re-emphasizes the poverty of the Zhou family:

When Mr. Zhou was arrested, he had less than one tael of silver. Out of this he spent one-third on a poor friend's funeral and one-fifth to buy some tung oil because it was the cheapest. Even with daily necessities such as lamp oil he has to be so careful. One can imagine how poor the family was.⁵⁴

It was very important for Zhu to establish this fact, because it justified the fundraising for Zhou to help pay off the three thousand taels of “embezzled money” and purchase some land to provide his widow and children with some means of livelihood. Next, Zhu breaks down the three thousand taels raised by various parties. In addition to the 500 taels donated by the Suzhou literati community upon the initial arrest of Zhou, they received:

1000, raised by Suzhou literati

500, through an official surnamed Xu

500, from officials in Beijing

530, through Fan Jingwen and Lu Shanji

Zhu names almost everyone who made contributions to supporting Zhou and Zhou's family. In his words, “I conclude this travel diary [by naming these gentlemen]. Their contributions deserve deep gratitude.”⁵⁵

While the diary and paratext created by Zhu himself do not present a coherent, overarching theme, others gave the material a sharper moral focus. In 1629, the diary was printed by Zhu's eldest son, with the financial support of Donglin sympathizers.⁵⁶ The project highlights Zhu's image as a friend. The postscript by his son focuses on his father's trustworthiness as an ideal Confucian friend. After the heroic trip, his efforts persisted:

[Father] became very ill but was unafraid. He said: “Mr. Zhou has already died. What's the meaning of my own life?” He had wanted to go to the court and petition for Mr. Zhou's innocence, but thought his death would not help. He also remembered that Mr. Zhou had entrusted him with the task of helping bury Mr. Zhou's parents properly. Further, Mr. Zhou's sons needed to be taken care of. There was so much left to do for Mr. Zhou. Father could not die yet. He had written in a public essay at the time: “I shall follow Mr. Zhou to death [afterwards].”⁵⁷ He then consulted various local notables about the burial, talked with Mr. Fan about purchasing property for the Zhou family, and invited his former teacher Mr. Wang to teach Zhou's sons. After these arrangements were made, Father's illness worsened; he began to vomit blood. On the sickbed he completed this diary. . . . Around this time, the new emperor was enthroned, and the world looked different. He was overjoyed: “I really didn't think I could live to see this happen!” On the morning of the day of

his passing, leaning against me, he wrote to Mr. Wen and Mr. Yao. The letters urged them to memorialize the emperor to right the wrong and recognize Mr. Zhou's loyalty. "Now I have repaid my good friend." He dropped the brush and passed away.⁵⁸

Two popular Suzhou literati composed prefaces for this publication. One argues that Zhu Zuwen's actions exemplified the ideal friendship among the righteous men: more than one of them had intended to travel with Zhou to Beijing, including the author himself, even though eventually only Zhu made the trip. He depicts Zhu as the ideal friend, describing how disappointed Zhu felt about losing the opportunity to rest Zhou's body in the coffin. He defends Zhu's perfect image by pointing out that Zhu had done everything he could as a friend. Lastly, he also claims that because Zhu fell ill while traveling to raise funds for Zhou, one could say that he actually died to repay Zhou's friendship.⁵⁹ The other preface makes the same point.⁶⁰ Zhu's ideal image as a friend embodies the moral exemplariness of the whole community of Dongling officials and their supporters.

The typically Confucian biographical style of these two prefaces—"compact, terse, and highly selective" so as to state and restate the exemplary—is a contrast to Zhu's diary and friends' letters included in this printed volume.⁶¹ Readers of the diary immediately noticed that it recorded moments of tension, distrust, and dissatisfaction. The letters, placed at the beginning of the printed version of the diary, contain even more unpleasant details and thus allow us to delve even deeper into this complex story of friendship making.

After completing the travel diary, Zhu Zuwen sent the manuscript to two officials, Wen Zhenmeng (1574–1636) and Yao Ximeng (1579–1636). These two men were the most prominent Suzhou natives at the time. Wen's response appreciated the details of the diary and considered it a valuable record of noble friendship. In particular, he noted that probably some of the most difficult emotions experienced by Zhu during the trip might be too nuanced to be conveyed adequately to its readers.⁶² In his letter, Yao Ximeng candidly admitted that until he read the diary he did not know that Zhu Zuwen had traveled to the north for Zhou Shunchang, even though he had led the fundraising for Zhou in Suzhou to help pay off the three thousand taels. Like Wen, Yao regarded the diary as a precious record of noble friendship, especially because their deceased friend, Zhou Shunchang, could not write an autobiography in prison himself.⁶³

Wen and Yao's comments on the diary manuscript revealed how literati society understood the implications of the diary: it was read as a

historical record based on which moral judgment would be drawn. A conspicuous note of disharmony in this otherwise perfect story of ideal friendship was its account of Lu Shanji and the money borrowed through him. Zhu Zuwen's high praise of Lu in the diary could not completely undo Lu's image problem, not to mention that the debt note, appearing repeatedly in the diary and paratext, loomed large in everyone's mind. This was not only an image problem but also a practical problem—after all, someone would have to cover the 150-tael loan (Zhu was able to return only 100 taels on his way back to Suzhou).

Collectively, the friends found solutions to both problems. In his reply written immediately after reading the diary manuscript, Yao Ximeng told Zhu that he recognized the debt note was an issue and he wanted to help take care of it.⁶⁴ In the next letter, he mentioned that he had already written to Lu Shanji.⁶⁵ Lu's reply to Yao, published in his own collected works, allows us to get a glimpse of the content of Yao's letter. Apparently, Yao thought Lu should not have held Zhu accountable for the loan. Lu defended his good intentions and explained he had never expected Zhu to repay it:

At the time the situation became so urgent that I had to loan some money. I took personal responsibility for the loan. There was no written contract. After going back to Beijing [from Dingxing], Mr. Zhu stubbornly sent me a debt note. I immediately burned it. Later Mr. Zhu sent me a letter via [Fan Jingwen's] messenger. Because the letter was not sent directly to me and the messenger did not return, I could not reply and explain the matter. It was my fault that our elderly friend was so distressed. Now Mr. Zhou's widow and young children are helpless. They have just lost their source of income and live in poverty. If we still talk about the debt note, people would think that all the chivalrous men are in Jiangnan and Hebei does not boast one single righteous person. I would be excluded from the records of committed friends. From now on, please do not mention this again. I would really appreciate it if you could tell Mr. Zhou in your prayer that I have taken care of the 150 taels of loan myself.⁶⁶

Lu then wrote to Zhu Zuwen. The letter repeated, almost word by word, what Lu had said in his reply to Yao Ximeng.⁶⁷ Before sending out the letter, however, Lu's eldest son, who had confronted Zhu rudely before,⁶⁸ first contacted Zhu. The son's letter, containing some phrases his father had used in the missive to Yao, conveyed the same message: we never intended Mr. Zhu to pay for the loan; we had it covered.

It is unnecessary for you to keep mentioning your concern about settling the previous debt note. At the time the situation became so urgent that some money had to be loaned. My father has personally taken responsibility for this. Although he did not explicitly say so, he actually meant this to be a donation. Mr. Zhou's funeral has been taken care of, but his wife and sons still lack money for everyday necessities. Where will they find extra money to repay this debt? . . . Your previous matter (the debt note) is completely settled now. Please do not worry about it anymore. I have

already talked to [Zhang Shiwei] about this and asked him to inform the gentlemen [in Suzhou]. My father will send a letter separately soon. I happened to know someone traveling to the south and asked him to deliver this letter first.⁶⁹

Did others involved in the event at the time also think Zhu was too sensitive and confused about Lu's intention? Likely not. Sun Qifeng, Lu's confidant in Hebei, had clearly differentiated the "loans" gathered by Lu from others' donations.⁷⁰ Sun's detailed account of the important role played by the Lu family in supporting the persecuted Donglin officials and their families meticulously records the generosity of the Lus. He would have mentioned the dramatic burning of the debt note had it actually happened. Further, as we have seen earlier, when Zhu stopped by in Hebei to settle some of the loans, Fan Jingwen explicitly expressed strong desire to personally take care of the part borrowed in Wujiao, while Lu's messengers accepted the partial payment on Lu's behalf.

Regardless of whether Lu had initially intended to repay the loan or not, his ambiguity—and the awkward moments experienced by Zhu Zuwen in Dingxing—became a problem as the travel diary was printed and circulated. Lu himself apparently learned about the contents and the publication of the diary. In a poem to a friend, Lu so reflected on this event: "My humble dwelling once received a guest/ His *Daily Records* vividly describes the hard time."⁷¹

When these letters from Lu and his son arrived, Zhu Zuwen had just died. However, they still served to negotiate trustworthiness. Zhu's son describes why he printed the letters:

The diary mentions my father's two unfulfilled promises: raising money from Mr. Fan (Jingwen) for purchasing property for the Zhou family, and paying off the loan borrowed through Mr. Lu (Shanji). They were on his mind when he finally closed his eyes. The fourth letter from Mr. Fan and the letters from the Lu father and son in this volume arrived after my father's passing. What a pity that my father died too soon to see them. I print them in this volume to conclude the matters and to recognize the gentlemen's noble friendship.⁷²

This passage clearly indicates the acceptance of the Lus' claim of good intentions. By publishing these letters with the diary, Zhu's son was able to present to the reader a perfect image of the Lus and the perfect ending of his father's story, thereby completing this narrative of noble friendship. These efforts solved all the practical and emotional problems.

Hence, this publication is not a stereotypical representation of a lofty ideal. Nor does it distort records, even though it serves certain agenda. Importantly, it participated in—and was the result of—negotiating trustworthiness among a group of literati. Coalesced around the mission

of helping Zhou Shunchang and his family, these men played different roles and took different actions. Some experienced spiritual growth and deepened their personal understanding of true friendship, while others approached their part less intellectually. Collectively they devised short-term and long-term solutions to a range of political, social, financial and emotional problems. Despite tension and confusion, eventually, those who were willing to negotiate trustworthiness based on shared moral expectations would be included in the history of ideal friendship. Such negotiations resulted in inclusiveness, but inclusiveness was built upon moral inspirations and patient communication rather than unprincipled compromise or hypocrisy.

CONCLUSION

Literati writing was meant to be circulated for specific personal and political agendas. Their version of events has prevailed, serving as a testament to both their friendship and the supposed rightness of their cause. Therefore, historians have to be extremely careful especially when reading the sources produced against the background of the late Ming factionalism and power struggle between eunuchs and bureaucrats. Meanwhile, we also should avoid adopting a cynical approach to Confucian moral tales.⁷³ This chapter hopes to open a window to a true story of Confucian idealism in the Ming. The multiple meanings of trustworthiness do not differ significantly in the classics and as practiced in life. It is not necessarily some monolithic idea but rather the *expectation for a process*, a process of efforts and negotiations through which the friends understand and fulfill their commitments. This story of idealism does not only present ideal situations or moral exemplars. It reveals failures, dissatisfactions, and some historical figures' self-preservation and self-interest, even though they have been memorialized in official and literati historiography as righteous men (for example, Lu Shanji). It may be considered the true story of Confucian idealism precisely because it shows the imperfection of the humans and how they could work *toward* ideal relations.

NOTES

- 1 David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, "Confucian Friendship: The Road to Religiousness," in Leroy S. Rouser, ed., *The Changing Face of Friendship* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 84. Emphasis in original.
- 2 Hall and Ames, "Confucian Friendship," 89. Emphasis in original.
- 3 On Friendship, see Martin Huang ed., *Male Friendship in Ming China* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

- 4 Zhang Shiwei, preface to Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1997), 158.
- 5 For a discussion of the eunuch persecution of Donglin officials, see John Dardess, *Blood and History in China: The Donglin Faction and its Repression, 1621–1627* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002). It should be noted that the so-called “eunuch faction” has been re-evaluated. For reappraisals of Wei Zhongxian and the politics of the Tianqi and Chongzhen courts, see Ulrich Hans Richard Mammitsch, “Wei Chung-hsien: A Reappraisal of the Eunuch and the Factional Strife at the Late Ming Court,” Ph.D. Diss., University of Hawaii, 1968; Lin Jinshu and Gao Shouxian, *Tianqi huangdi dazhuan* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui chubanshe, 2008), and Harry Miller, *State Versus Gentry in Late Ming China, 1572–1644* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). It should also be noted that the anti-eunuch biases in our historical sources do not mean that the brutality of Wei Zhongxian and some of his collaborators was fabricated.
- 6 Zhang Tingyu et al., *Ming shi* 12 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), juan 245/zhuan 133.
- 7 On late-Ming factionalism and how the images of the “good men” were produced and circulated for political purposes, see Ying Zhang, *Confucian Image Politics: Masculine Morality in Seventeenth-Century China* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2016).
- 8 Zhu Zuwen dated his preface “the fifth month of the year of bingyin” (165), but the end of the travel diary mentions events that happened after that month. It seems that he added more contents after writing the preface.
- 9 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu* (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1997), 165.
- 10 Siyen Fei, “Writing for Justice: An Activist Beginning of the Cult of Female Chastity in Late Imperial China,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 71.4 (Nov. 2012), esp. 998–9.
- 11 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 166.
- 12 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 169.
- 13 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 170.
- 14 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 170.
- 15 Sun Qifeng, *Yi-bing jishi* (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1994), 6b.
- 16 Again, the standard account and interpretation of this episode, which are reflected in Zhu’s documentation of his friend’s actions, are shaped by literati biases against eunuchs.
- 17 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 169.
- 18 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 174–5.
- 19 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 181.
- 20 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 180.
- 21 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 181.
- 22 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 184.
- 23 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 181–2.
- 24 The most revealing evidence can be found in Fan Jingwen’s letters, published in Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 161–3.
- 25 Roger T. Ames, *Confucian Role Ethics: A Vocabulary* (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2011), 89.
- 26 Pei-yi Wu’s definition of “spiritual autobiography” mainly refers to accounts that record spiritual or intellectual endeavor in an introspective mode. Comparing

Buddhist and Confucian narratives of self-examination, he rightly argues that Confucian self-cultivation was a “life-long journey.” Wu, *The Confucian’s Progress: Autobiographical Writings in Traditional China*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 95 and 140. Wu provides interesting insights on how the flourishing travel literature in the Ming contributed to the emergence of spiritual autobiography (chap. 5, esp. 132–3, 141). But he does not include this diary in his examples. Lynn Struve’s work on the highly politicized journey of the monk Hanshan Deqing reminds us that not all late-Ming “spiritual autobiographies” fall into the “Confucian” model. Lynn A. Struve, “Deqing’s Dreams: Signs in a Reinterpretation of His Autobiography,” *Journal of Chinese Religions* 40:1 (2012): 1–44. Zhu’s diary, as I point out in this chapter, clearly reflects the religious syncretism prevalent among the literati.

- 27 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 166.
- 28 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 168.
- 29 Religious syncretism is an important topic of historiographical debates for China scholars. It had been a feature of “Chinese religion” and continued to develop and evolve in the Ming period. For our purpose here, see Timothy Brook, *Praying for Power: Buddhism and the Formation of Gentry Society in Late-Ming China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), esp. chapt. 1.
- 30 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 172.
- 31 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 172.
- 32 For examples, see chapter 2 of Ying Zhang, “Politics and Morality during the Ming-Qing Transition: 1570–1670,” Ph.D. Diss., University of Michigan, 2010.
- 33 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 171.
- 34 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 179.
- 35 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 179. Yang Jisheng (1516–1555) was imprisoned and died for his opposition to the powerful Grand Secretary Yan Song during the Jiajing reign. Yan Song’s tenure is discussed in Roland Higgins’ chapter in this volume. Zhang Fei (?–221) was a general during the Three Kingdoms period known for his loyalty to and friendship with Liu Bei. For more on historical allusions to heroes from the Three Kingdoms, see Swope’s chapter on Li Dingguo herein.
- 36 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 179.
- 37 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 162.
- 38 Fan Jingwen’s letter (second) in Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 161.
- 39 See Fan Jingwen’s letters in Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 161–3. The fourth letter arrived after Zhu’s passing.
- 40 Cecilia Wee, “‘Xin,’ Trust, and Confucius’ Ethics,” *Philosophy East and West* 61. 3 (July 2011), 516–33.
- 41 Zhang, *Confucian Image Politics*, chapt. 2.
- 42 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 166–7.
- 43 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 175.
- 44 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 175.
- 45 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 181.
- 46 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 182.
- 47 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 181.
- 48 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 175.

- 49 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 183.
- 50 Fan Jingwen's letters included in Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 161-3.
- 51 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 183.
- 52 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 164-5.
- 53 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 165.
- 54 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 186.
- 55 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 190.
- 56 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 191.
- 57 According to Zhu Zuwen's diary, after he returned to Suzhou, he composed "Jiujing baoming" and documented what happened in Beijing, supposedly to report to his deceased friend, Zhou Shunchang. Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 185.
- 58 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 190-91.
- 59 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 159.
- 60 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 157.
- 61 Wu, *The Confucian's Progress*, 12 and 13.
- 62 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 160.
- 63 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 160.
- 64 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 160.
- 65 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 161.
- 66 Lu Shanji, "Da Yao Mengchang shu," *Lu Zhongjie gong ji Qiankun zhengqi ji* (Jingxian: Yuanjiang jieshu, 1892), 21.4b-5a.
- 67 "Qianyue Lu xiansheng shu," in Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 163. In Lu's collected works, this letter appears immediately after the reply to Yao. Lu Shanji, "Da Zhu Wantian shu," *Lu Zhongjie gong ji*, 21.5a-b.
- 68 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 177.
- 69 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 163.
- 70 Sun Qifeng, *Yi-bing jishi*, 7a.
- 71 Lu Shanji, "Zhou Zhongjie zhi nan qi youren Zhu Wantian jing yishen xun jin jian Shugao cangran you huai fu ci wei zeng," *Wuyuzhai shichao*, in *Siku quanshu cunmu congshu ji*-184 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1997), 728.
- 72 Zhu Zuwen, *Bing-yin beixing ripu*, 164.
- 73 For a discussion of these questions at the intersection of Ming political and intellectual history, see Zhang, *Confucian Image Politics*, esp. chapters 1 and 2.

CHAPTER 13

THE LINEAGE ORGANIZATION IN MING CHINA

A case study of Haining in the sixteenth century



Ivy Maria Lim

INTRODUCTION

The patrilineal descent group or *zongzu* – represented by the lineage genealogy (*zupu*), ancestral hall (*zongci*) and corporate estates – can be traced to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries during which it largely evolved into the form scholars of late imperial China are familiar with.¹ Ideologically it was not a new invention since neo-Confucian thinkers such as Cheng Yi (1033–1107) and Zhu Xi (1130–1200) of the Song dynasty (960–1279) advocated that the family, as a “kinship-based ritual unit,” should serve as the “basic building block of local society.”² In particular, Zhu Xi’s *Family Rituals* or *Zhuzi jiali* asserted that literati families could organize themselves as patrilineal kinship groups

descended from an apical ancestor with kinship solidarity supported by charitable estates.³ As Zhu Xi's *Family Rituals* was incorporated into the state canon and became the basis for ritual laws during the Ming, it set the standard towards which literati and non-literati families aspired as befitting their status as educated people. Thus, lineage genealogies, ancestral halls and endowed estates became symbols of the patrilineal descent group, or the family writ large, all serving the purpose of maintaining kinship ties beyond five generations and even beyond the stipulated mourning grades.

What differentiated the Ming-era lineage organization from that of the pre-Ming period was popularization of the lineage as an acceptable form of socio-familial organization. Pre-Ming lineages were looked upon as aristocratic families or *shizu*, with their genealogies or pedigree trees under the purview of state bureaus and ancestral sacrifices restricted to family temples or *jiamiao*.⁴ By the Ming, however, the spread of literacy resulted in a downward percolation of literati symbols and cultural norms that propagated ideals and standards among the common people of how one might exemplify one's literati or educated status.⁵ Lineage genealogies and pedigree trees became privately sponsored projects: now anyone with money and resources could compile their own family histories.

The spread of interest in genealogies went hand in hand with a change in ritual law. While the *Daming jili* and the *Daming huidian* allowed for the construction of ancestral halls for officials to offer sacrifices to four generations of ancestors, the common people were only allowed to create a chamber or *qin* wherein sacrifices were offered to two generations of ancestors. This ritual differentiation between officials and commoners was breached in 1536 as a consequence of the Great Ritual Debate of the 1520s.⁶ In that same year, after the *shimiao* or shrine dedicated to the Jiajing Emperor's father, the Prince of Anlu, was renamed as the *Xian huangdi miao* (lit. Shrine to Emperor Xian), Xia Yan (1482–1548), then Minister of Rites, proposed that officials and commoners should be granted the privilege of offering sacrifices to their primogenitors or *shizu* and be allowed to construct standalone family temples or ancestral halls as a mark of the emperor's benevolence and filial piety.⁷ While the key historical records are silent on the outcome of Xia Yan's proposal, the *Xu wenxian tongkao* records that imperial assent was given, a point corroborated by Ming observer Zhu Guozhen in his *Huangming dazhengji*.⁸ This change in ritual law effectively expanded the ritual focus beyond the family to the lineage. The ancestral hall, built in the orthodox style, became a widely copied literati symbol among the commoners, as did the compilation of lineage genealogies, framed, as they were, in discourses of filial piety. Ideals – such as

unifying agnatic kinsmen to honour the ancestors and providing aid through the endowed charitable estates – eventually filtered down to the lower levels of society where they correspondingly brought about a change in the way local society was organized in China.

The lineage organization thus became more common by the sixteenth century, albeit in variant permutations, stimulated by both the popularization of descent-line ethics and the social and economic changes occurring consequent to rapid commercialization taking place particularly in the Lower Yangzi delta. To understand the process of lineage creation in the Lower Yangzi, this chapter turns the spotlight onto the county of Haining in Zhejiang province where genealogy compilation can be observed from the early sixteenth century. While Haining was very much part of the rapid social and economic changes stimulating lineage creation, I would argue that the process of lineage creation in Haining was, in addition, catalysed by a period of disturbance brought about by what was known in the Ming records as the Japanese piracy or *wokou* crisis of the Jiajing reign (1522–66).

THE GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING: HAINING COUNTY

Haining is located on the coast of the Hangzhou-Jiaxing-Huzhou delta plains (also known as *Zhexi* or Western Zhejiang in late imperial times) in the Lower Yangzi region, a region known for its cultural and economic influence since the Southern Song period (1127–1279). As the locus of rapid commercialization due to the Southern Song court's push for maritime trade, the Lower Yangzi delta had been identified by Chinese scholars as the region where “embryonic capitalism” in pre-modern China took root.⁹ By the sixteenth century, observable changes in patterns of agricultural production and landholding, the transformation of landlord–peasant relationships, the rise of handicraft industries stimulated in part by the growth of national and international commercial networks that resulted in the inflow of silver via the maritime route from Japan (through the port of Nagasaki) and the Spanish New World (via the Philippines) all point to this “sprouting” of capitalism in China.¹⁰ The openness of the Lower Yangzi delta to commerce and the resultant prosperity in turn brought about the blurring of traditional occupational boundaries between officials, scholars and merchants in a world where social status became increasingly determined by wealth.¹¹

As home to well-known literary figures such as the Ming playwright

Chen Yujiao, historians Tan Qian and Zha Jizuo, the Qing poet Zha Shenxing and book collectors Wu Qian and Jiang Guangxu, Haining enjoyed a literary reputation though an early Qing local gazetteer described it as a remote but geographically important county that buffered the countries of Renhe and Haiyan from the strong sea-tides.¹² Alternatively known as Yanguan (*lit.* Salt Official) or Haichang (*lit.* Prosperous Seas), Haining was linked to the provincial capital Hangzhou, approximately 120 *li* (40 miles) away, by a network of waterways sourced from three major rivers. Three notable market towns – Xiashi, Chang'an, well-known as a rice trans-shipment centre, and Yuanhua – provided the commercial and social foci within the county.

As the market town of Lingquan *xiang*, Yuanhua was located at the foot of the Miaoguo Mountain and linked to the county seat by a 50 *li* waterway known as the Yuanhua Channel. Yuanhua was described as a *zhen*, a term which can be taken to refer to a military garrison headed by a commander or a marketplace as in *shizhen*. Going by the descriptions of Yuanhua in the gazetteer, it would seem that Yuanhua was most likely a marketplace or market town rather than a military post. Yuanhua was apparently part of the major salt-production centre known as the Xilu salt marsh that was formed in 1299.¹³ While the historical records are somewhat oblique about the local economy in Yuanhua, what is available suggests that apart from salt production, the cultivation of rice and other grains as well as sericulture also formed an important part of the local economy. Sericulture, in particular, seemed to have provided supplementary income as “the farming tenant households would plant mulberry trees at the sides of their fields, earning an extra two or three taels of silver every spring to offset the expenses of planting rice”.¹⁴

Yuanhua's history is similarly obscured in the records which suggest that the town either developed during the Tang dynasty as a *caoshi* (*lit.* grass market), or it may have grown from the marketplace linked to the Chongjiao Monastery located at the foot of the Miaoguo Mountain.¹⁵ Whatever the origins, by the late sixteenth century, Yuanhua's prosperity was unmistakable. Not only were local shops offering goods similar to that found in the larger cities of Jiaxing and Hangzhou, there were at least “fourteen to fifteen pawnshops in the town all making a profit of at least twenty thousand taels, with their earnings all coming from the households within a radius of several ten *li* of Yuanhua.”¹⁶ As prosperity increased, lifestyles of the local people changed as well, with lavish banquets serving rare and exotic dishes a common occurrence. Literacy became widespread, as evidenced by both local success stories in the civil service examinations and by the ready supply of local men seeking employment as teachers. Supposedly the backwaters of Hangzhou,

Haining evidently benefitted from the general prosperity brought about by sericulture and other commercial crops and even in the spread of literati culture as local men became educated and gained success in the imperial examinations.

MING CHINA IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Commercial growth in the Lower Yangzi

Haining's prosperity was no exception. Harriet Zurndorfer, in her *longue durée* study of Huizhou, characterized sixteenth-century China as "the best of times and the worst of times."¹⁷ Standing on the cusp of the sixteenth century, Ming China had just emerged from the global depression of the fifteenth century and initial signs suggested that things seemed to be finally looking up for China, after a long period of reduced inter-societal trade, universal debasement of currencies and degradation of arts and crafts.¹⁸ It was estimated that by the end of the fifteenth century, China had a "population probably in excess of 100 million,"¹⁹ a figure supported by dramatic increases in agricultural productivity due to the introduction of new food crops such as peanuts and maize, and the expanded cultivation of cash crops such as mulberry, cotton, and tobacco.²⁰ The growth of cash crop cultivation in turn stimulated the handicraft industries, especially in the Lower Yangzi delta, where market towns or *shizhen* developed in response to new economic opportunities and became specialized production centres or markets for specific products. For instance, the towns of Wuqing, Nanxun and Shuanglin were well-known sericulture centres while the town of Puyuan, where "nine out of ten households" lived by the loom, became famous for its woven silk products.²¹ Other towns such as Fengjing, Luodian and Nanxiang were in turn known for producing cotton cloth.²²

To some extent, this commercial boom could be attributed to the long-term effect of reopening the Grand Canal in 1415 after dredging and repair works were carried out. Originally intended as the artery for transmitting annual tax grains from the Lower Yangzi to the new capital at Beijing in the north in place of the maritime transport route, the Grand Canal quickly became the conduit via which private commercial traffic flowed between north and south China, so much so that the state eventually imposed transit duties on private goods.²³ The market towns identified above were but a handful of the many towns and centres of production that had sprung up along the route of the Grand Canal and its tributaries.²⁴

Another factor that accounted for the commercialization was the influx of silver that, as a result of a bullion boom in central Europe, became the medium of exchange for tea, silks, porcelains and other Chinese goods demanded by the Europeans.²⁵ Thus by the late sixteenth century at least, items that were considered luxury commodities in the early Ming had become commonplace. The influx of silver led to changes in lifestyles which grew more lavish and opulent as connoisseurship and conspicuous consumption became the order of the day. The wealthy spent time and fortunes creating landscaped gardens, collecting curios and being fashionable, in line with popular trends and the “taste manuals” that were making their appearance.²⁶ Indeed, it appeared to be the best of times.

THE WOKOU CRISIS

The prosperity enjoyed in the Lower Yangzi region was brought about in part by the influx of silver that was, in fact, making its way into the Chinese economy illegally. The very active maritime trade that was carried on by Chinese private traders and their foreign counterparts flouted the maritime prohibition or *haijin* instituted by the founding emperor Hongwu (r. 1368–98) in 1372. The promulgation of the *haijin* decreeing that not even a plank of wood was allowed at sea jeopardized the economy of the South China coast where entire populations, dependent on fishing and maritime trade with Southeast Asia and Japan since the Southern Song period, were now restricted from their traditional livelihoods.²⁷ While not a Ming innovation, the *haijin* as envisioned by the Hongwu emperor was unique in the extent of control sought over this long-established international commerce. Not only were Chinese merchants forbidden to trade overseas, all inbound foreign trade became inexorably tied to foreign policy as imports were funnelled into the monopolistic tributary trade system that became part of the official tribute missions. Initial implementation of the *haijin* chalked up additional social costs with coastal populations, “boat households” and landless people forcibly moved inland and registered into military households which were in turn distributed amongst the system of forts and garrisons along the entire southeastern coast.²⁸

As shown by Roland Higgins elsewhere in this volume, the *haijin* was only as effective as its enforcement which never proved to be very stringent nor sustained. Foreign traders claiming to be tribute envoys continued to arrive at Chinese ports without regard for the stipulated frequency and size of tribute missions, and often without the authorized tally or *kanhe* that would permit them to trade. People from the coastal

provinces continued building seagoing ships and putting out to ports overseas, while claiming to be fisher-folk. Those who flouted the *haijin* were considered fugitives in the eyes of the court, but a number of those who left in fact made their way back to China as officials of Chinese vassal states, such as Lin You from Fujian who served as an interpreter in the 1410 embassy from the kingdom of Ryukyu to the Ming court and Xiao Mingju, a native of Jiangxi, who was appointed interpreter for the 1508 tribute mission from Melaka.²⁹ This situation continued all the way to 1522 when a quarrel between two rival Japanese “tribute missions”, one of which was led by Song Suqing, a native of Ningbo, erupted into a riot at Ningbo and provoked debates at court over the enforcement of the *haijin*.³⁰

The renewed attention of the court on the littoral turned the spotlight onto the sorry state of affairs in the coastal military establishment. The long period of peace on the southeastern coast not only lulled the coastal authorities into complacency, in some cases, those supposed to be enforcing the *haijin* were in fact the ones actively flouting it with their abetment of and collusion in the lucrative illicit trade with smugglers. Coastal fortifications and patrol ships had fallen into disrepair while the coastal defence establishment was plagued with problems of desertion, corruption and even mutiny as was the case in 1529 when several hundred soldiers from the Panshi Guard in Zhejiang kidnapped a local official to press for their pay.³¹ Despite reports of such incidents reaching the throne, apparently nothing much was done to remedy the situation, as Zhu Wan, the Touring and Inspecting Censor-in-Chief for Zhejiang and Fujian, discovered to his consternation while on his inspection tour along the coast in the late 1540s.³² By the 1550s, as efforts by the state to exert control over the unruly coastal areas and to suppress the smuggling networks intensified, the heightened security measures only served to push both Japanese and Chinese maritime traders and adventurers along the China coast into carrying out armed raids on the mainland, eventually culminating in what entered the Ming records as the *wokou* crisis of the Jiajing reign.³³

The intensity and frequency of the *wokou* raids increased throughout the early 1550s, leading to worries in Beijing that Hangzhou, the provincial capital of Zhejiang and the southern terminus of the Grand Canal would be threatened. These fears materialized in 1554 and finally roused the court into more deliberate action against the *wokou* with the creation of the post of Supreme Commander or *zongdu* that for the first time provided a unified military administration encompassing South Zhili, Zhejiang, Shandong, Guangdong, Guangxi and Fujian, with discretionary powers granted over all military and civilian personnel.³⁴ With such heavy responsibilities came not only high expectations but

also implication into factional politics in Beijing resulting in the execution of the first supreme commander Zhang Jing (d. 1555) for his supposed ineffectual stewardship.³⁵ Zhang Jing's successor, Hu Zongxian (1512–65) fared better, lasting seven years in the post, by exploiting tensions and conflicts among the rival pirate chiefs and by the effective use of his troops made up of a motley assortment of imperial forces, mercenaries, salt smugglers, fighter monks, private militias and aboriginal fighters.³⁶ It is very much to Hu Zongxian's credit that he was able to navigate the complicated fiscal situation on the ground, as well as maintain a finger on the pulse at court so as to ensure that he had sufficient support to get support for the strategies he pursued. Indeed, in the highly factionalized atmosphere of the mid to late Ming, only those who could juggle these multiple responsibilities and interest groups had much chance of achieving success in such endeavours.

Hu Zongxian's anti-*wokou* campaign brought a change to local society in the Lower Yangzi delta which now experienced state intervention right down to the level of village communities. One key difficulty in fighting the *wokou* was the active collaboration and participation of the local people as followers or guides of the *wokou* bands that made identification of the real culprits difficult. Records of the *wokou* campaigns are often replete with stories of how *wokou* bands could move through the countryside and obtain food and shelter easily, despite numbering in the hundreds and thousands, as the pirates "imitated the dress styles of [the] villagers and even wore military uniforms to disguise themselves", making it difficult to distinguish them from the real troops.³⁷ Later memories of the seeming impunity by which the *wokou* advanced through China even influenced Toyotomi Hideyoshi's failed invasion of the continent as discussed by Masato Hasegawa in Chapter 24 of this volume.

Into this chaotic situation was added the motley assortment of different groups of fighters that made up Hu Zongxian's main force. While famed for their martial prowess, these outsiders had no knowledge of the local terrain, customs or language and many worsened the situation by looting and conniving with the pirates or even turning to banditry themselves after being decommissioned. It was largely due to the troubles created by aboriginal troops from Yongshun and Baojing that local governments in Zhejiang and South Zhili began to train their own local militia to avoid having to rely on these "guest soldiers" again.³⁸ The decade-long crisis, which saw the devastation of market towns and county cities, and the overrunning of garrisons and forts, only came to a closure in 1567 when the *haijin* was finally relaxed in a limited way by allowing for licensed private "trade with the eastern and western oceans" in the port of Meiling in Nanzhao, Fujian which was

later replaced by the port of Haicheng.³⁹

To those who lived through these trying times, it must have seemed like the worst of times. Not only did the people have to try and survive the *wokou* plundering, they also had to worry about the imperial forces and the bands of mercenaries now prowling the region. Caught between the two competing forces of illegitimate plunder and state-backed military action, and cognizant of the implications behind the social classifications of *liangmin* (good people) and *jianmin* (wicked people) imposed by registered *lijia* status or lack thereof, the appearance of distinctive lineage organizations in Yuanhua with all the accompanying symbols *circa* the 1550s suggest that this was the solution sought by groups resident in Haining as a way out of their predicament. While the lineage organization had been slowly making its appearance in Haining in the early years of the sixteenth century, the pace actually picked up during and after the *wokou* crisis. In what were presumably chaotic times with *wokou* attacks going on, to be able to draw agnatic kinsmen together and work at establishing their self-professed identities as lineage groups thus suggests motivations other than filial piety at work.

THE LIJIA SYSTEM

Increased monetization of the economy impacted Ming traditional society and economy in other ways as well. The increased circulation of silver eventually led to the practice of converting tax grains and corvée service obligations into payments denominated in silver. This had great impact on the *lijia* system of household registration and taxation instituted in 1381 by the Hongwu emperor. Under the *lijia*, all households, categorized as military, civilian, artisan and saltern households, were issued with a registration certificate or *hutie* recording the number of able-bodied *ding* in each household. These in turn were compiled into the Yellow Registers or *huangce* which provided both state and local administrators with essential population and fiscal information.⁴⁰ To facilitate tax-collection and corvée services, *lijia* households were grouped into perpetual communities or *li* of 110 neighbouring households with the ten wealthiest households within the group taking on the *lizhang* or community head post that would be rotated once a decade. The rest of the hundred households were then divided equally into ten *jia*, each represented by a *jiashou*.⁴¹ Each *lizhang* would be responsible for ensuring the fulfilment of corvée service obligations due by *li* under his watch.

As might be expected in a system with such neat and inflexible categorizations, the *lijia* failed to capture the reality of every household

in the land. Many households simply were not eligible for taxes and corvée service.⁴² Yet others, such as the boat people or *danmin* and the beggar households or *gaihu*, fell through the cracks because as unregistered people, they paid no taxes, fulfilled no corvée service and were excluded from conventional paths to wealth and influence such as the imperial civil service examinations or military service, simply by their lack of the *hutie*. The *danmin* were boat people who could be found along the coast of southeastern China while the *gaihu* or beggar households were those whose members worked as undertakers, sedan-chair porters and other similar lowly vocations in Zhejiang. Despite the nomenclature, some of them were by no means poor. As such, *lijia* registration and the accompanying *hutie* took on legal and social implications: the possession of a *hutie* was considered sufficient proof of one's status and identity as amply demonstrated by the Sun lineage of Pinghu *xian* whose *hutie* was reproduced in its entirety in the 1627 gazetteer as evidence of their prominence and influence.⁴³ Where the *hutie* was no longer extant or non-existent, it was often alluded to in the lineage genealogies. In other cases, outright fraudulent claims of literati status were sometimes made, as in the case of the Zhu of Huayuan, a group resident in the vicinity of Yuanhua.

The Zhu of Huayuan claimed descent from none other than Zhu Xi and the extant genealogy, compiled in 1828, is filled with an impressive collection of prefaces dating from the twelfth century, including one by Zhu Xi himself.⁴⁴ One might have been easily impressed by the supposedly illustrious ancestry of the Zhu of Huayuan, but a closer reading of the documents reveals the prefaces to be a motley assortment collected from other groups bearing the Zhu surname resident in Wuyuan, Anhui and Haining in what appears to be an attempt to exploit the moral and literary prestige of Zhu Xi's name rather than genuine agnatic ties. Further attempts in the genealogy to concoct both wealth and civilian household status could be seen in the inclusion of property division records and, significantly, a *hutie* belonging to not one, but two unrelated Zhu-surnamed groups in Hangzhou.⁴⁵

The commutation of land-tax and corvée obligations into silver payments over the course of the sixteenth century transformed the *lijia* into a system of fiscal accounting. For local magistrates tasked with ensuring the fulfilment of tax obligations each year, the key concern was more one of continuity and less with who in actual fact provided the corvée service. This effectively shifted corvée service assessments to landholdings possessed by the household instead of the number of able-bodied *ding*.⁴⁶ While this might have advantaged the small-scale farmers and tenant farmers at first glance, the opposite happened instead. The complicated fiscal system of the Ming, coupled with the lack of

standardized and coordinated practices as well as the lack of proper safeguards such as credit facilities, meant that small-scale farmers or tenant farmers often ended up losing their land to encroachment by wealthy landowning households who then passed the burden of the land tax onto them. These fiscal reforms initially took place on an *ad hoc* basis depending on the initiative and energies of the local magistrates. During the 1530s, there emerged a general consensus that the land tax assessments and labour requisitions had grown too unwieldy for the *lijia* which led to attempts to apportion service obligations equally against all taxation land and the entire pool of able-bodied *ding* and to collect those payments in silver. These attempts came to form the basis of the Single Whip Reform instituted in the late sixteenth century by Zhang Juzheng.⁴⁷

By the late sixteenth century at least, landholding and work patterns in China underwent changes as the gentry-literati class consolidated their landholdings and passed the tax burden onto the peasants and tenants, who found it easier to abandon their land and place themselves on the employment market where demand for labour and services were stimulated by the commutation of service levies into silver payments. Mercenaries were an easy source of manpower for the militias recruited by various local governments, military commanders, and wealthy individuals for the purpose of defending their native areas or areas of command against the incursions of the *wokou*. One estimate of the possible number of men available in Zhejiang for recruitment was 16,000, an indication of how widespread economic displacement during the mid-sixteenth century might have been.⁴⁸

As observed by He Liangjun, a scholar in Songjiang, by the 1540s, many farmers had been displaced from their land or had abandoned farming for other occupations, becoming servants and tenants of wealthy families or itinerant peddlers and hawkers of seasonal labour.⁴⁹ The *lijia* system was, by then, no more than an onerous shell which registered households sought to shake off by reorganizing themselves justified by the much-idealized and state-sanctioned principle of descent-line ethics. Expedited perhaps by the appearance of officials, degree-holders and men educated in the Confucian tradition within the *lijia* groups, they thus sought to dissociate themselves from their fiscal obligations through the adoption of what Patricia Ebrey terms the “cultural repertoire” of the literati, appropriating the symbolic and cultural capital embedded in kinship ritual practices, liturgies, ancestral shrines and the lineage genealogy.⁵⁰

What then might be the relationship between the lineage and the *lijia*? The genealogy of the Huayuan Zhu provides some clues. According to

Zhu Yujiao, it is recorded that when Xu Tianzeng arrived in Haining as the new magistrate in 1567 and began his land surveys, one of the first things Zhu Shaofang, the lineage heir then, did was to present him with a register of the various descent-lines in the Huayuan lineage and their tax obligations, depicted through the descent-line charts, indicating the economic and political implications of the document.⁵¹

This episode ties in with the observation of Huang Wan (1477–1551), a Ming observer, that when laws were passed prohibiting local authorities from harrassing the *lijia* households for miscellaneous taxes and surcharges, the authorities turned to the wealthy households in the local areas, not realizing that “the wealthy households were in fact the *lijia*.”⁵² If the *lijia* was indeed the dominant social and financial organization in the Ming, as long surmised, the presentation of the descent-line charts by Zhu Shaofang to the magistrate suggests that perhaps by the sixteenth century, it was the *lijia* that had evolved into the lineage. For members of the *lijia*, settled in the same area and perhaps bearing the same surname, given the legitimation provided through the genealogy and the ancestral shrines, it may have been a natural transformation. *Lijia* registration that conferred legitimacy and social status through the *hutie* was becoming replaced by the symbols of the lineage.

GENEALOGY COMPILATION IN HAINING

A sampling of the Haining genealogies would confirm this conjecture. As a specialized genre of writing, the genealogies that emerged in the Ming drew inspiration from the genealogies compiled by Song dynasty reformers such as Fan Zhongyan (989–1052), Ouyang Xiu (1007–72) and Su Xun (1009–66) which became templates for those who came after them. With the expressed intention of revering the ancestors and uniting the clan, the genealogy explicitly upheld standards of propriety by opening the leaves of the genealogy only to those deemed morally worthy. Others “who had violated family morality (sons becoming monks, widows remarrying, kinsmen engaging in political rebellion, etc.) were omitted from the record if their behaviour could not be disguised by euphemism.”⁵³ This moralistic *raison d'état* meant that genealogy compilation was looked upon as an obligatory act of filial piety since, according to the early Ming scholar Song Lian (1310–81), to not compile one's genealogy for three generations was an act of filial impiety. This was further explained upon by his student, Fang Xiaoru (1357–1402) who asserted that genealogy compilation not only gave one knowledge of one's ancestors but also clarified degrees of agnatic kinship

and hierarchy, thus uniting and reinforcing familial ties.⁵⁴ As such, proponents of descent-line ethics viewed genealogy compilation as both demonstration of filial piety and reverence for the ancestors and the means by which one's entry into the lineage and hence entitlement to the economic, political and social benefits of the corporate body was controlled, thereby enforcing social norms.⁵⁵

As a literati creation, the genealogy thus is a collection of documents that provide insights into the ways groups perceived and identified themselves as lineages. Given that the mere possession of a genealogy was effectively an assertion of literati status and background, the political, social and economic values associated with the genealogy cannot be underestimated. For anyone with social ambitions in late imperial China, the genealogy would be a must-have, which explains the “disturbing practice” described by Zhao Jie, of selling genealogies, a commercial service started by one Yuan Xuan, a Suzhou scholar, who fleeced his “rich but uncultured” clients with concocted pedigrees “packed with the famous in history.”⁵⁶

The Haining genealogies share a common pattern. The foundation legends often point to the southward migration of the Song court in 1127 as the cause for settlement in Haining, after which lines of descent prospered over several generations before the genealogy was compiled. Those who spearheaded compilation efforts were usually concerned member(s) of the group who had achieved success in the civil service examinations or by other means, often justifying their project as one of ensuring unity and clarifying kin relations within a rapidly expanding circle of agnatic kin. The importance placed on clarifying kin relations and lines of descent often extended backward in time to claim illustrious figures from the past as ancestors. Purported burial sites of ancestors' remains became ancestral burial grounds and the foci for ancestral ritual sacrifices which gradually came to be offered in stand-alone ancestral temples.

THE BANHAI ZHANG

One could see this pattern played out in the genealogy of the Banhai Zhang surname group in Haining with some variation. Claiming native status in Haining through descent from a military official by the name of Zhang Yongzhong who served in the Kingdom of Wuyue (*circa.* 951–61), the extant genealogy of the Banhai Zhang positioned the group as one with a long history in Haining with various burial grounds and residences scattered along the length of the Yuanhua Channel and around the vicinity of Yuanhua. Their social prominence stemmed from

the claim that Zhang Yongzhong was in fact a descendant of the eminent Tang dynasty chancellor and scholar Zhang Jiuling *and* a member of the prominent Zhang clan who worked as salt producers on the Zaolin River for generations. So loyal and unstinting was their prompt deliveries of annual salt tax to the Southern Song court that they were even awarded the appellation of *Jimao banhai* by the Song emperor Xiaozong (r. 1163–89), hence their self-identification as the Banhai Zhang.

A closer examination of the Banhai Zhang genealogy, however, suggests there's more to the story. The extant genealogy, compiled in 1503, contains a preface, dated 1503, by one Teng Zhen who identified the earliest genealogy of the Zhang as a Song dynasty compilation by Zhang Shaoliang, ninth-generation descendant of Zhang Yongzhong, which presented the clear origins of the group, clarified lines of descent and was deemed “worthy to be transmitted as believable truth.”⁵⁷ This original genealogy was however destroyed during the Song-Yuan interregnum and a second genealogy was compiled during the Dade reign (r. 1297–1307) of the Yuan dynasty. This project, spearheaded by thirteenth-generation descendant Zhang Zhongshan, a salt official in the Xucun salt field in Haining, relied on the professional services of a Pei Di from Yuyao county, suggesting perhaps that the commercialization of genealogy services may have begun even earlier than what was observed by Zhao Jie. Pei Di's compilation was lost in 1420 when a great flood engulfed the family properties and ancestral burial grounds.⁵⁸ All that was left were fragments salvaged by sixteenth-generation descendant Zhang Kui who, though he tried, could only piece together a descent-line chart that helped to ensure proper generational order and placement during the ancestral sacrificial rituals.⁵⁹

The careful identification of the ninth- and thirteenth-generation descendants of Zhang Yongzhong by Teng Zhen was no mere recount. By the commonly accepted rules of mourning and ritual regulations that restricted non-official households to the veneration of five generations of ancestors, the domestic altars of the thirteenth generation in the Zhang group would have contained spirit tablets bearing the names of ancestors from the ninth generation onward. When Zhang Kui attempted to create his descent-line chart after 1420, these would have been the names he found. While the earlier records were assumed to be destroyed by war and natural calamity, it was also possible that these purported earlier records simply did not exist. The fact that Zhang Kui's descent-line chart was incorporated into the 1503 compilation suggests that this chart was in fact the earliest of the Zhang's genealogical records.

The 1503 compilation, under the sponsorship of eighteenth-generation descendant Zhang Tingyu, provided insights to the extent to which bogus genealogies were possibly becoming the norm, with the Zhang having to repeatedly reject overtures from others of the same surname who came bearing their genealogies in the hope of establishing kin relations.⁶⁰ While the Banhai Zhang resisted all overtures on grounds that such moves would deceive the ancestors and bring disaster upon the lineage, these scruples apparently disappeared by the next compilation in 1556 when not only was the claim of descent from Zhang Jiuling made but pruning of the family tree took place by striking off those who “acted against familial relations.”⁶¹ The kinship link to Zhang Jiuling was further clarified in the next compilation dated 1585 by the compiler Li Yuanhui who positively identified Zhang Yongzhong as the son of Zhang Guanghan, a seventh-generation descendant of Zhang Jiuling. Not only that, it was also in this compilation that the settlement legend of Zaolin River as well as the claim of the Song dynasty award by Emperor Xiaozong were first included. In adopting Zhang Jiuling as their primogenitor, the generational ordering of the descent lines were also changed.⁶²

By claiming descent from Zhang Jiuling while alluding to their origins as saltern households through the Zaolin River settlement history, the Banhai Zhang was in effect making a political statement in the 1556 and 1585 genealogies. The first claim in 1556 – of descent from Zhang Jiuling – was a claim to literati heritage which was in turn supported by the Zaolin foundation legend that added the declaration of registered *lijia* status as saltern households to the group. The claim to literati status would have affirmed not only the group’s legal right to occupy land but also eligibility of male descendants to participate in the imperial examinations and exemption from corvée services and ad hoc levies, while their lack of other cultural symbols associated with the lineage – such as ancestral burial grounds, landholdings and other properties – were explained by the frequent floods that inundated the Zaolin area. The point being made in 1556 and 1585 is that although not registered as tax households, the Zhang had, in fact, originated from a legitimate registered group and were hence eligible to the same benefits.

What might be the possible motivations for the Zhang group to make such claims? When one scans the landscape for possible reasons, the *wokou* crisis raging along the southeastern coast in the mid-sixteenth century comes to the forefront. The claim of descent from Zhang Jiuling in 1556 could not have been made at a more appropriate time. The *wokou* crisis was reaching a crescendo in western Zhejiang between 1555 and 1556 and efforts to curtail the piratical raids rampant in the region were increasingly stepped up. At precisely the time when

government troops and mercenaries were on the lookout for *wokou* pirates in Yuanhua and its vicinity, the Zhang surname group, living on the coast and not registered in the *lijia*, took pains to declare that they *were* in fact of literati descent via the appropriation of Zhang Jiuling and therefore legitimate. It was the only way to declare, without the demonstrable proof provided by a *hutie*, that they were of *liangmin* status and not the *wokou* or conniving collaborators the anti-*wokou* campaign was seeking. This declaration, contained in a simple statement in the 1556 preface to the genealogy, would have provided the Zhang protection and immunity against the ad hoc taxes and levies imposed by Hu Zongxian to raise funds for the anti-piracy campaigns. Given the lack of scholar-officials in the group during the sixteenth century, this fictitious claim of descent was perhaps their last resort.

The additional clarifications of descent from Zhang Jiuling and the inclusion of the Zaolin legend in 1585, long after the subsiding of the *wokou* raids, suggests a further attempt at legitimation. Having claimed literati descent in 1556, it was now incumbent on the descendants in 1585 to substantiate that claim. This they did with the help of Li Yuanhui, presumably a professional genealogist, who revised the descent line charts and tweaked the generational counts to accommodate Zhang Jiuling as primogenitor.

THE ZHA OF LONGSHAN

While the Zhang relied on professional help to compile their genealogies, the self-styled Zha of Longshan in Yuanhua turned to successful scholar-officials among their numbers to compile the lineage histories. The Zha of Longshan claimed descent from a Zha Junbao (1325–1385) who migrated from Huizhou to Zhejiang and settled down in Yuanhua in 1357 at the Gupu Bridge (later renamed as the Zha Family Bridge) to the east of Longshan.⁶³ Zha Junbao apparently possessed medical skills which he put to good use, gaining in return a plot of good *fengshui* land located south of his abode that, when used as a burial ground, was believed to ensure prosperity for his descendants.⁶⁴ The veracity of this claim was indeed borne out in the descendants of his youngest son Zha Hui. As early as 1480, fifth-generation Zha Huan (1464–1510, *js.* 1490), the great-grandson of Zha Hui, obtained his *jurem* degree, one of the first men in Haining to do so. He was followed by similar success stories in the successive generations with sixth-generation Zha Yue (1472–1530) who became the regional inspector of Shandong; seventh-generation Zha Bingyi (1504–1561) who rose to become the metropolitan governor of Beijing (Shuntian); eighth-

generation Zha Zhilong (1534–89), the left administration vice-commissioner of Shandong; and ninth-generation Zha Yunyuan (1560–1610) who held the post of education inspector of Jiangxi. These were but the most outstanding members in the lineage which also produced dozens of minor degree holders, low-ranking officials and government students, earning for the group a reputation of literary erudition.⁶⁵

In line with this literary eminence, Zha Huan compiled a draft genealogy in the late 1490s or early 1500s which claimed Zha Junbao as a member of the prominent Zha surname group in Xin'an, Huizhou. The completeness of Zha Huan's genealogy seems suspect given that it was referred to by Zha Yue as a "poor start." More significant however is the fact that Zha Huan, being of the fifth generation and the first successful examination candidate in the group, apparently fulfilled the requirements of the law – that imperial examination candidates should come from households registered in the *lijia* and show proof of *liangmin* status with information pertaining to four generations of ancestors. This suggests that perhaps Zha Huan's genealogy was composed and presented to fulfil the requirements for the examinations, with Zha Junbao's supposed descent from another Zha surname group in Xin'an as evidence of *lijia* registration. Zha Huan's compilation was followed by another compilation in 1524 by Zha Yue who included imperial edicts, essays and descent-line charts so that "future generations would be able to read and not forget."⁶⁶ By asserting that his compilation was based on Zha Huan's genealogy, Zha Yue was in effect asserting that the Zha surname had been an established household in Yuanhua since the 1520s.

While the next Zha genealogy was compiled almost a century later, in 1618, members of the Zha group were, in the intervening period, working actively towards establishing their social standing within the local community through other means. Their status as a literati surname group secured by high-ranking officials in their midst, the Zha of Longshan worked towards clarifying their ancestral ties with the Zha surname group in Huizhou, an understandable move considering that the Zha was one of the major established lineages or *daxing* (lit. great surname) in Huizhou. Attempts were thus made in the 1530s and 1540s when Zha Bingyi and his son Zha Zhili made a trip to Xin'an and established links with the Wuyuan Zha lineage in 1530. The apparent outcome of this trip was recorded in 1549 in the form of a contract drawn up between Zha Bingzhi, Zha Bingyi and Zha Bingyue of Haining and the descendants of a certain Zha Chu in Wuyuan who was supposedly the uncle of Zha Junbao. In this contract, both sides agreed to each come up with thirty taels of silver to "buy lands and establish ancestral sacrifices" in Wuyuan which would be entrusted to "the

rotational management of Yunrui and others of the Wuyuan branch” who were allowed to cultivate the fields but expressly forbidden to sell the lands off.⁶⁷ While the size of the estate thus established was not recorded, given that ten taels of silver could purchase one *mu* of land or two bondservants in Huzhou, the total sum of sixty taels agreed upon by both sides would have established an estate of a respectable size, assuming that prices in Huizhou were similar to Huzhou.⁶⁸

What we have here is something rather strange then. The Haining group apparently hooked up with the descendants of Zha Chu who were in fact located in Yangzhou and both groups came to an agreement to establish an estate to support several burial plots which were ostensibly ancestral burial grounds, *and* entrust that estate to a third group, whose kin relation to them was not clarified in the documents. What was happening then was three distinct groups bearing the same surname coming together to consolidate their claims of common ancestry through the establishment of a corporate estate. The fact that it was the Haining Zha group that initiated this collaboration further suggests that they were trying to negotiate their way into the lineage of the more established Zha in Wuyuan through the endowment (literally a donation) of an estate. The ties thus created and the accompanying claim of being a sub-set of a “higher-order lineage” would have enhanced their social standing within Haining.

The timing of Zha Bingyi’s attempt to create a more illustrious background for his lineage in the 1540s and 1550s again points to the influence of the *wokou* crisis in the background as well as the true identity and status of the Zha group in Haining. Zha Bingyi’s active genealogical manipulations, coupled with his frequent correspondence with members of the anti-*wokou* campaign containing fervent appeals for remission of salt duties, suggests that the Zha group could have originated as a group of saltern households that found success through the imperial examinations or given their status as landowners, were the landlords and patrons of tenant saltern households in Haining.⁶⁹ Taken as a whole, the efforts of the Zha group in Haining, spearheaded by Zha Bingyi, to establish kinship links to a much larger, more prominent and socially important surname group in Huizhou was yet another socio-political statement in the making. While the assertion of this Huizhou link, along with their already undisputed literati status might not have provided them with additional protection against the *wokou*, the correspondence Zha Bingyi conducted with members of the anti-*wokou* administration of Hu Zongxian, a Huizhou native, suggests that it might have played a part towards allowing members of the group some influence over strategies and policies implemented by the Supreme Commander.

ANCESTRAL HALLS AND CORPORATE ESTATES

The lineage genealogy, by itself, would have merely created a corporate identity for groups of agnatic kinsmen coming together to identify themselves as such. For that identity to be recognized within the local community however, ancestral halls and corporate estates became the means by which this was achieved. The 1536 change in ritual law had brought about a clarification of doubts among officials (and commoners) over the propriety of building free-standing ancestral halls. Chang Jianhua suggests that the law might have in fact encouraged officials to construct ancestral halls and offer sacrifices to more than the permitted four generations of ancestors on a regular basis and to their apical ancestors on the two prescribed days of winter solstice and first day of spring.⁷⁰ Through these acts by the officials and their kinsmen, the precedence and trend for such practices were set for imitative acts by commoner families, especially when such ritualistic ceremonies sometimes became public theatrical displays of festivity akin to that of a market fair as the following description from the genealogy of the Zhu of Haichang shows:

On the days of the sacrificial rites, which are Qingming and the first day of the tenth month, gaily dressed men and women, supporting the aged and leading the young by the hand, would come and watch the [sacrificial] proceedings. They sometimes number to the thousands and the hundreds. The small traders would carry their goods and take the opportunity to hawk them while on the Qingming day, there were even women who would bring silkworm cocoons and display them while we carried out our sacrificial rites.⁷¹

As people began to substitute the stipulated temporary paper tablets of apical ancestors with wooden (and thus permanent) tablets, the practice of maintaining ancestral halls in which ancestors, no longer limited by the number of generations, were venerated beyond the offering of sacrifices on stipulated days became more entrenched. By building their own ancestral halls and offering sacrifices to the ancestors installed therein, many people, both officials and commoners alike, could now trace their ancestry to far-removed, vaguely related (at times totally unrelated) personalities and claim descent by virtue of the person's spirit tablet installed in their ancestral hall and honoured as the primogenitor. By the same token, groups with the same surname but who might hitherto have no acknowledged kin relations, might now consider themselves kinsmen and members of the same descent-line based on their claims of common descent, thus leading to the creation of broad-based lineages through the compilation (or concoction) of genealogies as discussed earlier in the case of the Zha of Longshan.⁷²

The example of the Zhu of Haichang cited above might too be illustrative of this trend. One of the professed four major surname groups resident in Yuanhua, the Haichang Zhu were, according to their genealogical records, part of a much larger descent-group residentially spread out among Yuanhua, the nearby town of Shidun, the Chongde county and at a place identified in the records only as the Shu Family Bridge. The group that was resident in Yuanhua identified themselves as the *Taisanlang* (lit. The Third Grand Gentleman) branch, so named after the style name or *hao* of their apical ancestor Zhu Gurui (1335–92) who was descended from the primogenitor identified simply as a Mr. Sanwu (lit. Mr. Thirty-five) who migrated from Kuocang to Haining during the Yuan dynasty. The *Taisanlang* branch was prolific and by the early Ming period, had segmented into the Yi'an, Shi'an and Jing'an branches. As a group, the wealthy Haichang Zhu survived the Yuan-Ming interregnum relatively unscathed because they “knew and kept to their place” and prospered in the early Ming thanks to the efforts of Zhu Ding (1364–1423).⁷³

In addition to accumulating wealth for his descendants, Zhu Ding also left behind a small shrine to the left of the ancestral tombs that functioned as a sacrificial chamber throughout the early Ming. This shrine, supposedly built during the Hongwu reign, was reconstructed, expanded and repaired at different points throughout the Ming dynasty. It came to be designated as the *dazong ci* or ancestral hall of the major line of descent, housing the spirit tablet of Mr. Sanwu and his descendants through the eldest line, thus indicating that the management, upkeep of the shrine and its attached endowed estates as well as the offering of sacrifices came under the purview of the Yi'an branch. The two junior branches of Shi'an and Jing'an were recorded in the genealogy to have maintained their own foci of ancestral sacrifices at two different locations, built between the late fifteenth to the early sixteenth centuries.

The timing here is important, as it suggests that throughout the early Ming, until the 1500s at least, the three branches of the Haichang Zhu, while claiming common descent, did not come together as a corporate body to offer collective ritual sacrifices. This situation however changed in 1575 when members of the Shi'an and Jing'an branches jointly sponsored renovations of the shrine and then installed the spirit tablets of their apical ancestors on the altar within the *dazong ci*.⁷⁴ What happened in 1575 – the financial contribution of the two minor descent-lines to the upkeep of the shrine – suggests that it was only then, and significantly after the 1536 proposal, that the three hitherto disparate branches linked up to form a broad-based lineage organization.

The symbolic power of the ancestral hall comes not only in its architectural style but also in the rituals offered therein. Depictions of ancestral halls collected within the genealogies often depict buildings that were constructed according to the prescribed official style, thereby providing a visual testimony of literati and imperial connections to anyone resident in or visiting the locality. It also stood as a concrete symbol of the lineage as the focus of ancestral worship shifted out of the private sphere within the *qin* in the home into the public sphere of the ancestral hall, catering not only to a wider agnatic base, but also providing a visual spectacle to the local community as well. The public nature of the sacrificial rituals, together with the implicit acknowledgement of the ancestral hall as a symbol of authority and the Confucian liturgical ceremonies thus combined to underscore public acknowledgement of membership and its attendant benefits. The pomp and ceremony of the rituals and participation in such rituals thus became public and visual indications of social standing and legitimacy within the group and local community, as the example from the Zhu of Huayuan illustrates:

Every year, the sacrificial ritual is held on the Qingming Day. The wealthy and able [of the lineage] are chosen in rotation as the head of the ceremony, bearing all expenses for the ritual. On that day, drums and music are played, wine and food prepared and no matter how far or near, how rich or poor, how noble or common, young or old, each [member] would come bearing two offerings to be placed before our ancestors. Before the lineage heir stands the master of ceremony. The rest [of the members] would stand in order and prostrate four times. The lineage heir would offer incense and wine. After three offerings, the eulogy would be recited. . . . This would be followed by another four prostrations and then paper offerings would be burnt. At the end of the ceremony, the descendants would stand to both sides. The head of the ceremony would then call out their names to come forward to collect their offerings. Several tables of food would then be set up in accordance to the number present. . . . Each table would be shared by four persons and there are over a hundred tables.⁷⁵

Such pomp and ceremony would perhaps be unsustainable in the long run without sufficient means to carry them out. To this end, as well as to provide needy lineage members, such as the widowed, orphaned, aged and the talented without means, with access to aid, lineage organizations tended to establish landed estates. This was the case in Haining where several of the lineage groups endowed corporate estates, often linked to ancestral halls, for the expressed purpose of providing perpetual support for ritual sacrifices.

CORPORATE ESTATES

Taking the Zha of Longshan as an example yet again, what we know from their genealogy is that beginning in the mid-sixteenth century, certain influential members within the group began a series of estate endowments that started with Zha Bingyi's donation of nineteen *mu* of lands for the expressed purpose of providing for the spring ancestral sacrifice that was offered in rotation by his line of descent.⁷⁶ Thereafter, Zha Zhilong (1534–89), worried by the fact that some kinsmen were having to borrow money to fulfil their ritual obligations and that sacrificial rites might be abandoned if such difficulties persisted, donated twenty-six *mu* of fields for the purpose of providing “grains and rice and paper offerings for the annual sacrifices without cease”.⁷⁷ Yet another member, Zha Zhihong (1532–1612) donated a plot of land which became the foundation of a new ancestral shrine that was in turn supported by the thirty *mu shanchan* (*lit.* supply estate) established by Zha Yunyuan (1560–1610) to provide for expenses such as repairs and renovations to the shrine.

Perpetuation of lineage success and influence also became a primary concern and much of this was translated into endowments intended specifically for education and cultivation of talented young members of the lineage, and at times, of one's own branch. Zha Zhilong for instance endowed a second estate where he set aside part of his inheritance, amounting to one and a half *qing* of land in all, to establish an estate to support in the provision of sacrifices and burials, and for living and education expenses of his paternal, maternal, affinal kin and local people.⁷⁸ This second endowment thus contrasted with his earlier endowment which provided for lineage-wide sacrificial expenses, by including not only his affinal kinsmen but even the poor of the locality as well. The reach of his charitable estate went well beyond that of the kinship group.

The link between the lineage and the *lijia* can again be extrapolated from the workings of a charitable estate, this time, that of Zha Yunyuan. Having died without male heirs, Zha Yunyuan's estate was divided among his tomb heir, his nephew and son-in-law. In addition, his life savings were used to purchase some 422 *mu* of lands which was used to establish a charitable estate to support poor and needy members of the lineage. More significantly, members of the lineage went on to petition the prefect of Hangzhou to register this charitable estate under the household of Zha Yunyuan in order to use it to “fulfill one of their *lijia* obligations” and to be “exempt from their miscellaneous corvée service” with the proviso that if their petition was granted, it should be “permanent and not be rescinded. Even if the official [the *lijia* obligation was registered under] passes away, the tax obligation will not be transferred to another household.”⁷⁹ As a ranking official, Zha Yunyuan

and his household would have been exempted from *corvée* services and once registered under his household, now perpetuated by the tomb heir, the Zha descendants could now pass on the fiscal obligations assessed on the rather sizeable amount of lands in the charitable estate to tenant farmers and workers.

CONCLUSION

One key impact of the mid-sixteenth century *wokou* crisis was to throw into sharp relief the potency of legitimacy-conferring labels and actions of political alignment. In an area such as Haining where the state's influence often stopped with the magistrate as the emperor's representative, the escalated imperial response to the *wokou* crisis led to massive deployment of troops and extension of administrative reach right down to the lowest level of society. The appearance of state-employed mercenaries, roaming the countryside at free will in search of *wokou* pirates and their collaborators, emphasized sharply to many people resident along the coast the need of self-protection. In a society where *lijia* status traditionally conferred legitimacy because only those registered were considered loyal subjects of the emperor, it behoved the people of Haining to ensure that they were able to demonstrate possession of the correct credentials that would render them legitimate in the eyes of the state.

Yet it was also a society that was undergoing tremendous changes in values and in terms of what was considered legitimate. The *lijia* system, long considered to be the dominant form of social and financial organization in the Ming, had, since its institution in 1381, evolved into a system of control and taxation rather than household registration. Returning to Huang Wan's earlier observation of the congruity between the *lijia* and the wealthy households, I would argue that what we are seeing in Haining is not so much the replacement of the *lijia* by the lineage organization but rather the beginning of the fundamental reconfiguration of local society from *lijia* to lineage. The spread of literacy and literati norms coupled with the popularization of descent-line ethics and the granting of imperial license to construct ancestral halls in 1536 all came together to propel the lineage to the forefront as a form of social organization, apparently eclipsing the *lijia*. Hence, while legitimacy was once conferred by the *hutie*, by the mid- to late-sixteenth century, it was increasingly determined by one's identification with the lineage – with its sanctioned liturgies carried out in the ancestral shrines, literati status implied by the genealogies, and social and economic control wielded through descent line charts and endowed corporate

estates. In the case of Haining, because some of the agnatic groups had produced scholars and officials since the late fifteenth century, when the *wokou* crisis hit home and their *lijia* status (or the lack of it) became an issue, the best form of protection was for these groups to enter the administrative embrace of the Chinese state through ritualistic and political alignment with state-sanctioned practices, thus presenting the lineage as the alternative to the *lijia* and a new way of organizing local society.

NOTES

- 1 This formulation of the patrilineal descent-group follows the paradigm of Maurice Freedman who viewed the Chinese descent group in terms of resource control and allocation rather than through the definition of kinship. See Maurice Freedman, *Lineage Organization in Southeastern China* (London: Athlone Press, 1958) and *Chinese Lineage and Society: Fukien and Kwangtung* (London: Athlone Press, 1966).
- 2 Peter K. Bol, *Neo-Confucianism in History* (Cambridge, MA, & London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008), 238.
- 3 Ibid., 240.
- 4 This was the case during the Northern and Southern dynasties period (420–589) where genealogies used in the appointment of officials were compiled by genealogists on order of the court. See Chang Jianhua, *Zongzu zhi* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1998), 246–47.
- 5 For the symbolic significance of cultural norms of the gentry-literati, see Timothy Brook, “Family Continuity and Cultural Hegemony: The Gentry at Ningbo, 1368–1911,” in Joseph W. Esherick and Mary Backus Rankin, eds., *Chinese Local Elites and Patterns of Dominance*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), 27–50.
- 6 For details regarding the controversial Great Ritual Debate, see Carney T. Fisher, *The Chosen One: Succession and Adoption in the Court of Ming Shizong* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1990).
- 7 Xia Yan, *Xiaguizhou xiansheng wenji*, 1638 edition, reprint (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1997), 11.74a–75b.
- 8 See Wang Qi, *Xu wenxian tongkao*, 1586 edition, reprint (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1996), 115.25b–27b and Zhu Guozhen, *Huangming dazhengji*, reprint (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1996), 28.28a. For more on the controversy surrounding the 1536 ritual law, see Zuo Yunpeng, “Citang zuzhang zuquan jiqi zuoyong shishuo”, *Lishi yanjiu*, 5 – 6 (1964), Li Wenzhi, “Mingdai zongzu zhi de tixian xiangshi ji qi jiceng zhengquan zuoyong”, *Zhongguo jingjishi yanjiu*, 1 (1988) and Zheng Zhenman, *Ming-Qing Fujian jiazu zuzhi yu shehui bianqian* (Changsha: Hunan jiaoyu chubanshe, 1992), 229–30.
- 9 See Wang Shixin, “Capitalism in Late Ming Dynasty”, in Xu Dixin and Wu Chengming, eds., *Chinese Capitalism 1522 – 1840*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), 23–112.
- 10 See Richard von Glahn, *Fountain of Fortune* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996) and William S. Atwell, “International Bullion Flows and the Chinese Economy, circa 1530–1650”, in Dennis O. Flynn and Arturo

Giraldez, eds., *Metals and Monies in an Emerging Global Economy*. Brookfield, VT: Ashgate / Variorum, 1997), 141–64.

- 11 See Zhao Jie, *Brush, Seal and Abacus: Troubled Vitality in Late Ming China's Economic Heartland, 1500–1644* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2018).
- 12 Tan Qian (comp.), *Haichang waizhi*, 1647 edition, reprint (Taipei: Chengwen chubanshe, 1983), 25.
- 13 Jin Ao (comp.), *Haining xianzhi*, 1765 edition, reprint (Taipei: Chengwen chubanshe, 1983), 52–3.
- 14 Xu Dunqiu, *Jingsuo biji*, reprinted in Chen Xuewen, *Zhongguo fengjian wanqi de shangpin jingji* (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1989), 320.
- 15 Zhou Chun (comp.), *Haichang shenglan*, 1852 edition, reprint (Taipei: Chengwen chubanshe, 1983), 4.8a–8b.
- 16 Xu, *Jingsuo biji*, 318.
- 17 Harriet T. Zurndorfer, *Change and Continuity in Chinese Local History: The Development of Hui-Chou Prefecture 800 – 1800* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989), 112.
- 18 William S. Atwell, “Time, Money, and the Weather: Ming China and the ‘Great Depression’ of the Mid-Fifteenth Century,” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 61.1 (February 2002), 83.
- 19 William S. Atwell, “Ming China and the Emerging World Economy, c. 1470–1650,” in Denis C. Twitchett and Frederick W. Mote, eds., *The Cambridge History of China Volume 8: The Ming Dynasty 1368–1644 Part 2*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 378.
- 20 Atwell, “Time, Money, and the Weather,” 83.
- 21 Jin Huai and Pu Huang (comps.), *Puchuan suowenji*, 1820 edition, reprint (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1992), 1.2b–3a.
- 22 For more information, see Fan Shuzhi, *Jiangnan shizhen: chuantong de biange* (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2005).
- 23 Timothy Brook, “Communications and Commerce,” in Denis C. Twitchett and Frederick W. Mote, eds., *The Cambridge History of China Vol. 8 The Ming Dynasty 1368 – 1644 Part 2*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 597–603.
- 24 Fan Shuzhi estimates that within Western Zhejiang alone, there were at least 115 market towns in existence or that were developing into specialized markets or production centres. See Fan Shuzhi, *Ming-Qing Jiangnan shizhen tanwei* (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 1990), 75–83.
- 25 Atwell, “Ming China and the Emerging World Economy,” 388–91.
- 26 See Craig Clunas, *Empire of Great Brightness: Visual and Material Cultures of Ming China, 1368–1644* (London: Reaktion Books; Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007).
- 27 See Zhao Zhongchen, *Mingdai haijin yu haiwai maoyi* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2005), 1–15 for a brief description of China's maritime trade from Han to Yuan times. For more on the Ming maritime prohibition, see Li Kangying, *The Ming Maritime Trade Policy in Transition, 1368–1567* (KG, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co., 2010).
- 28 See Chen Shangsheng, *Huaiyi yu yishang: Mingdai haiyang lilian xingshuai yanjiu* (Jinan: Shandong renmin chubanshe, 1997).
- 29 Chan Hok-Lam, “The ‘Chinese Barbarian Officials’ in the Foreign Tributary

- Missions to China during the Ming Dynasty,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 88.3 (July–Sept 1968), 412, 414.
- 30 For a discussion of the debates surrounding the *haijin*, see Ivy Maria Lim, “From *haijin* to *kaihai*: The Jiajing Court’s Search for a *Modus Operandi* along the South-Eastern Coast (1522–1567),” *Journal of British Association for Chinese Studies*, 2 (July 2013), 1–26.
- 31 Michael Szonyi, *The Art of Being Governed: Everyday Politics in Late Imperial China* (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017), 101.
- 32 For more on Zhu Wan, see Roland L. Higgins, “Pirates in Gowns and Caps: Gentry Law-Breaking in the Mid-Ming,” *Ming Studies*, 10 (Spring 1980), 30–37.
- 33 For a sampling of studies on the *wokou* crisis, see Dai Yixuan, *Mingdai Jialong jian de wokou haidao yu zhongguo ziben zhuyi de mengya* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1982); Chen Wenshi, *Ming Hongwu Jiajing jian de haijin zhengce* (Taipei: Guoli Taiwan daxue wenxueyuan, 1966) and So Kwan-wai, *Japanese Piracy in Ming China during the Sixteenth Century* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1975). Also see Roland Higgins’ chapter in the present volume.
- 34 *Ming shilu*: *Shizong shilu*, juan 410.
- 35 See So, *Japanese Piracy in Ming China*.
- 36 For a discussion of Hu Zongxian’s strategy against the *wokou*, see Charles O. Hucker, “Hu Tsung-hsien’s Campaign against Hsu Hai, 1556,” in Frank A. Kierman Jr. and John King Fairbank, eds., *Chinese Ways in Warfare*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 273–307.
- 37 Cai Jiude, *Wobian shilue*, 2.2b.
- 38 *Mingshi*, juan 310, 7994.
- 39 See Zhang Xie, *Dongxiyang kao*, reprint (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), 131.
- 40 For more on the Yellow Registers, see Wenxian Zhang, “The Yellow Register Archives of Imperial Ming China,” *Libraries & the Cultural Record*, 43.2 (2008), 148–75.
- 41 Timothy Brook, “The Spatial Structure of Ming Local Administration,” *Late Imperial China*, 6.1 (June 1985), 29–30.
- 42 *Ibid.*, 32.
- 43 Cheng Kai, *Pinghu xian zhi*, 1627 edition, reprint (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1993), 10.12b–15b.
- 44 See Zhu Enshou (comp.), *Huayuan zhushi zongpu* (1828) [hereafter *HYZSZP*], *juanshou.yuanxu*.
- 45 For a discussion of the Zhu of Huayuan’s genealogy, see Ivy Maria Lim, *Lineage Society on the Southeastern Coast of China* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2010), 129–36.
- 46 See Michael Szonyi, “The Lineage and the *lijia*: Genealogical Explorations in the Local History of the Fuzhou Region,” in Genealogical Society of Utah, Sha Qimin and Qian Zhengmin, eds., *Zhongguo zupu difangzhi yanjiu* (Shanghai: Shanghai kexue jishu wenxian chubanshe, 2003), 229–31.
- 47 For details, see Ray Huang, *Taxation and Governmental Finance in Sixteenth-Century Ming China* (London & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974).
- 48 See Zheng Ruozheng (comp.), *Chouhai tubian*, reprint (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu, 1983), 5.72b–5.73a.
- 49 He Liangjun, *Siyouzhai congshuo*, reprint. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), 112.

- 50 See Patricia Buckley Ebrey, “The Early Stages in the Development of Descent Group Organization”, in Patricia Buckley Ebrey and James L. Watson eds., *Kinship Organization in Late Imperial China 1000–1940*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986), 16– 61.
- 51 *HYZSZP*, 19.11a.
- 52 Huang Wan, *Mingdao bian*, reprint (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 51.
- 53 Joanna M. Meskill, “The Chinese Genealogy as a Research Source”, in Maurice Freedman, ed., *Family and Kinship in Chinese Society* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1970), 146.
- 54 Fang Xiaoru, *Xunzhizhai ji*, reprint (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu, 1983), *juan* 1.
- 55 Li Wenzhi and Jiang Taixin, *Zhongguo zongfa zongzuzhi he zutian yizhuang*, (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2000), 69.
- 56 Zhao, *Brush, Seal and Abacus*, 37.
- 57 Shen Yinlie (comp.), *Haining Banhai Zhangshi chongxiu zongpu*, 1919 edition, *yuanxu*.1a.
- 58 *Ibid.*, 44.3a–4a.
- 59 *Ibid.*, *yuanxu*.1b.
- 60 *Ibid.*, *yuanxu*.2b.
- 61 *Ibid.*, *xuxu*.1b.
- 62 *Ibid.*, *xuxu*.3a–3b and 42.3a–4a.
- 63 Zha Shiyan (comp.), *Longshan zhashi zupu* (1808), 1.8a; 15.3a.
- 64 *Ibid.*, 15.3a.
- 65 *Ibid.*, 10.9b.
- 66 *Ibid.*, *yuanxu*, 2a–3a.
- 67 *Ibid.*, 11.2b–3a.
- 68 See Zhao, *Brush, Seal and Abacus*, 72, for a discussion of prices of land and bondservants in Huzhou.
- 69 Zha Bingyi, *Jue’an cun’gao*, Ming edition, reprint (Beijing: Zhonghua quanguo tushuguan, 2001), *juan* 4, n.p.
- 70 See Chang Jianhua, “Mingdai zongzu cimiao jizu lizhi ji qi yanbian”, *Nankai xuebao* 3 (2001), 60–67.
- 71 Zhu Tingxi (comp.), *Haichang zhushi zongpu xu* [hereafter *HCZSZP*], 1932 edition, 15.3b–4a.
- 72 Li and Jiang, *Zhongguo zongfa zongzuzhi*, 20–21. On the development of the genealogy preface as a literary genre and a localist strategy in the mid-Ming, see John Dardess, *A Ming Society. T’ai-ho County, Kiangsi in the Fourteenth to Seventeenth Centuries* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996) and Anne Gerritsen, *Ji’an Literati and the Local in Song-Yuan-Ming China* (Leiden, Boston, MA: Brill, 2007).
- 73 Zhu Guangshou (comp.), *Haichang zhushi zongpu*, 1881 edition, 13.3a–3b.
- 74 Zhu Tingxi (comp.), *Haichang zhuzhi zongpu xu*, 1936 compilation, 7.1a– 1b.
- 75 *HCZSZP*, 18.6a–7a.
- 76 *LSZS*, 12.3a and 15.2a.
- 77 *Ibid.*, 15.2a; 11.8b–9a.
- 78 *Ibid.*, 11.9b.
- 79 *Ibid.*, 11.13b.

CHAPTER 14

SOARING DRAGON AMID DYNASTIC TRANSITION

Dates and legitimacy among the post-Ming Chinese
diaspora



Xing Hang

From 2014 to 2016, I conducted fieldwork in Southeast Asia. I visited many Chinese temples, shrines, guild halls, and cemeteries: the essential fixtures of diasporic community and identity in their respective locales. I scrutinized tomb carvings, steles, plaques, and inscriptions on incense burners and roof beams for insight into the history of Chinese immigration and settlement in the region. I took a special interest in the dates that typically occupy the closing line of these epigraphic records. They were marked in diverse ways, including Qing imperial reign names, the traditional Chinese sexagenary system of stems and roots (*ganzhi*), native Southeast Asian conventions, and even the Western solar calendar.

Among them, what particularly intrigued me were inscriptions that carried the term Longfei (Soaring Dragon). At first glance, it seems like a reign title, but it always appears in front of two *ganzhi* characters and never the precise numerical year of a ruling emperor, as would usually occur when referring to an actual imperial dynasty. Moreover, when examined in their proper context together with other epigraphic and historical evidence, the dates in Longfei always convert to those overlapping with the Qing period. Even more surprising was the widespread prevalence of this convention. I have seen inscriptions dated in the Longfei format at Chinese temples and cemeteries in southern Vietnam, the Hanoi area, and Melaka. I found myself asking, what is the exact meaning of Longfei, and what are its antecedents? How did some overseas Chinese communities come to use this dating system, and why did they choose to do so?

In their monumental study of epigraphic inscriptions in Malaysia, Wolfgang Franke and Chen Tieh Fan convincingly assert that Longfei represented a substitute used by the Chinese in Melaka to avoid the actual Qing reign name. Through this act, they “may have preserved some loyalty toward the deposed Ming Dynasty and were therefore reluctant to use the reign name of the Manchu emperor.”¹ John E. Wills, Jr. agrees that it “must be a Ming Loyalist marker,” and points to the symbolic association of the dragon with power in both Chinese and Southeast Asian lore.² For the renowned Chinese scholar Rao Zongyi, on the other hand, Longfei represented nothing out of the ordinary. According to him, it merely highlighted the auspicious nature of particular dates.³ Claudine Salmon and Li Qingxin take the middle ground. In their meticulous examination of epigraphic materials in Vietnam, they emphasize the role of Longfei as a convenient marker of ambiguity. It allowed ethnic Chinese to safely express their Ming loyalist sentiments while not upsetting the legitimacy of their host societies, such as Vietnam’s own system of imperial reign names.⁴

This chapter aims to synthesize the tremendously insightful interpretations of these scholars and make use of their extensive collection of epigraphs. In addition, I supplement them with textual sources and my fieldwork findings from China, Japan, and Southeast Asia. In this manner, I can historicize the study of dating systems and treat them as a window toward a broader understanding of the Ming-Qing dynastic transition’s impact upon the overseas Chinese across maritime East Asia from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. Moreover, the paper integrates the experiences of the diasporic communities with developments in China over the same period. It examines how Han Chinese struggled to preserve their ethnic identity while reconciling it with political allegiance to dominant outsiders,

whether the conquest Manchu Qing Dynasty at home, or native East Asian kingdoms and European colonial authorities overseas.

As it argues, the initial widespread dissemination of Longfei in the five or six decades after 1644 constituted one core element of resistance to Manchu rule, especially amid the absence of a strong Ming central authority. By the middle of the eighteenth century, however, the fear of antagonizing the ruling elites of their adopted lands, often dependent upon the goodwill of the Qing, had caused many overseas Chinese to temper their sentiments. Moreover, the influx of a new wave of traders and settlers from Qing territories after 1684 made regularized exchange and amicable relations with the new dynasty almost a necessity. However, residual expressions of defiance continued to simmer underneath the surface, crystallizing into a sense of ethnic Han exclusivity that coexisted uneasily with their reluctant acceptance of Manchu rule in China.

ORIGINS AND ANTECEDENTS IN CHINA

The only time Longfei was ever used in an official capacity occurred in the fourth century CE. Lü Guang (b. 337 CE, r. 396–400), a general of the Di ethnicity, had proclaimed it as his reign name when he founded the Later Liang (386–403 CE) in Gansu. His state was one of the Sixteen Kingdoms, a series of overlapping, short-lived dynasties dominated by Inner Asian tribal groups that fragmented the political space of North China and coexisted in uneasy hostility with the Eastern Jin south of the Yangzi.⁵ However, the term itself had come into use much earlier, appearing in the work of the famous historian Jia Yi (c. 200–169 BCE), who lived during the Western Han (202 BCE–220 CE). Jia had already defined Longfei as referring to the “master of mortals (*renzhu*),” or the reigning emperor in the generic sense. It served as a convenient shorthand for the phrase, “the dragon flies high in the sky (*feilong zai tian*).” Later works provided a more precise interpretation, equating it to the accession or coronation of a new ruler.⁶



Figure 14.1 Plaque inscribed by Yang Guolin, an official at the Board of Revenue, and hung at the Huaisheng Mosque in Guangzhou. The date, situated on the right-hand side literally reads: Longfei Kangxi *wuyin* year, second month of spring, auspicious first day (approximately February 1698)

Surviving physical examples of Longfei's use in China mostly date from the Qing Dynasty, but its origins were probably much earlier. The phrase made frequent appearances on steles and plaques in conjunction with the actual date in the imperial reign name, either in numerical form or the sexagenary system of stems and roots. The inscription on a plaque attached to a prayer hall on the grounds of the famous Huaisheng Mosque in Guangzhou typifies this order of characters ([Figure 14.1](#)).

The display of the year, *wuyin* Longfei Kangxi (1698), evidently aimed to magnify the authority and presence of the ruling emperor by highlighting the time that had elapsed since he ascended the throne. The vision conjured by a dragon “flying into the sky” would also contribute to the mystique and auspicious character of the inscription in question. Steles and plaques of a similar format from earlier and later periods, bearing, for instance, Longfei Shunzhi (r. 1643–61) and Longfei Jiaqing (r. 1796–1820), can also be found elsewhere in Guangzhou, such as the area around the northern gate tower that now houses the city museum. The elaborate nature of the dating style on these and other epigraphs

demonstrates their functions as objects of display primarily for the consumption of a literate elite, whose loyalty and support were essential for the legitimacy and survival of the ruling dynasty.

References to Longfei, often without the corresponding reign name, also appear in Qing-era documents and epigraphic materials intended for nonofficial or private circulation. Liu Yongxian, a retired hydroelectric expert and avid collector of historical artifacts, has produced in his publication a plaque inscribed in the calligraphy of Feng Jinzuo (1735–?), prefect of Xinghua, in Fujian. He had dedicated it to Ke Wenfeng, an elderly man residing within his constituency, on the occasion of the latter's eighty-second birthday. Feng had completed the inscription on “an auspicious day at the beginning of the new year of Longfei *xinchou*,” which would translate to 1781 in the Western calendar.⁷

A team of Japanese researchers who conducted meticulous surveys in Taiwan during the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries have uncovered a large collection of contracts likewise dated in the Longfei year. They mostly deal with familial issues, including marriage, divorce, the sale of wives, and the employment of matchmakers.⁸ I myself have located a contract with an exclusive Longfei date from around the same period on an online Chinese auction site.⁹ It stipulates the division of property among brothers for a plot of land, probably in southern Fujian or eastern Guangdong.¹⁰ Popular religion was another realm where this dating system could frequently be found. Wang Zhenzhong has discovered a few nineteenth-century incantations containing the Longfei mark during his fieldwork in Huizhou, in the late imperial commercial heartland of Jiangnan. Apparently written down as a guide primarily for laymen to chant or recite during pilgrimages to prominent temples and shrines, their content consisted of appeals to Buddha or popular deities for relief of suffering, a smooth childbirth, and bountiful harvests.¹¹

As the use of Longfei in these documents reveals, either the formal imperial reign name mattered little to the contracting parties, or they possessed sufficient mutual social and familial knowledge and trust to dispense with it. In fact, ambiguous methods of dating similar to Longfei make occasional appearances as well. One religious incantation in Wang's study ended with a date counted in the year of Huanghao, or, literally, “Imperial Reign Name.”¹² The appearance of Longfei in private documents and epigraphs thus bore little relation to Ming loyalism or political resistance to Manchu rule.

In fact, many of them made explicit mention of affiliation or connection to the ruling dynasty elsewhere in the written body. In the

plaque dedicated to Ke Wenfeng, Feng Jinzuo, the presenter of the gift, explicitly identified himself according to the degrees, ranks, and titles that he had received from the Qianlong court (r. 1736–96).¹³ The religious exhortation from Huizhou dated in the Longfei year began with a petition to the gods from “a disciple of . . . Huizhou prefecture of Jiangnan province in the Great Qing.”¹⁴ The Taiwanese contracts sometimes included the equivalent Guangxu reign period (r. 1875–1908) directly following Longfei, just like the case with the publicly displayed steles and plaques.¹⁵ The contract for splitting up clan property contains information about renovations to the ancestral hall that were later appended to the main text. These improvements were carried out on three separate occasions, each recorded in accordance with Qing conventions, namely Guangxu 27 (1901), Guangxu 30 (1904), and Guangxu 33 (1907).¹⁶

A CONFUSED STATEMENT OF RESISTANCE

Although the use of Longfei within China throughout the Qing normally had politically neutral connotations, it could become a potent symbol of resistance once combined with other forms of expression and action. Certain scholars have gone as far as to characterize it as a concrete imperial reign name proclaimed by anti-government rebels with the aim of founding a new dynasty. Charles Wheeler’s enlightening dissertation argues that Zhang Lian, a pirate battling the Ming court in eastern Guangdong during the sixteenth century, was the first individual to coin the term of Longfei. He did so as part of an effort to engineer “an entire state apparatus along the imperial model.” Although ultimately defeated in 1561, Wheeler claims that Zhang may have later fled to either Sumatra or Hội An in central Vietnam, where Longfei was taken up by overseas Chinese, and popularized during the Ming-Qing transition.¹⁷

While Wheeler tells a convincing story and traces a clear etymology, it contains serious inaccuracies. Rao Zongyi and Cheng Zhangan conclude from their examination of historical sources and fieldwork in the Chaozhou area that Zhang Lian never used a Longfei reign name. Neither did he officially proclaim a new dynasty, but rather appropriated the title of “Flying Dragon Master of the Mortals (Feilong renzhu)” for himself. Note that the characters for “dragon” and “flying” are inverted. Moreover, a monument erected by Ming authorities clearly documents Zhang’s death at the hands of government forces.¹⁸

Through my own work with historical sources, I have traced Longfei’s earliest recorded use in a political context to the Ming-Qing transition within China. It appeared in two prefaces written by Ming loyalists to a

published compilation of the words and deeds of Master Yinyuan (1592–1673), head abbot of the Huangbo Temple in Fuqing, northern Fujian. A renowned figure in Chan Buddhism and sympathetic toward the anti-Qing resistance movement, he left his native place for Japan in 1657 to further the transmission and propagation of his school.¹⁹ Not surprisingly, his writings have been preserved in their most complete form in Japan.

The first preface to his work came from the hand of Liu Yichun, who closes off his contribution with “Longfei *yiyou*, start of summer.”²⁰ The only equivalent year that falls within Liu’s career and lifespan would be 1645. It was a tumultuous period in China. In 1644, the Chongzhen Emperor committed suicide as Beijing fell to advancing peasant rebels. Shortly thereafter, Manchu forces entered the city and proclaimed Qing rule over the entire empire. Ming officials in the subsidiary capital of Nanjing tried to establish a reconstituted dynastic order south of the Yangzi by upholding the Hongguang Emperor’s (1607–46, r. 1644–45) claim to the Ming throne. However, the Manchus had crossed the river by June 1645 and put an end to the short-lived regime.²¹ Therefore, Liu wrote the preface during a time of tremendous political flux. Within the brief space of a year, the Ming emperor in Beijing, as well as the imperial relative who promised to be his credible replacement, had both fallen in rapid succession. Liu would later assume an official position under the Prince of Lu (d. 1661), who proclaimed a regime based in coastal Zhejiang and northern Fujian in August 1645.²² However, these subsequent events had not taken shape when he wrote the preface. His uncertainty as to the new Ming claimant to uphold, combined with his continued refusal to recognize the Qing, made his choice of Longfei logical.

The author of the second preface, Chen Suijie, wrote under similar circumstances. A native of Xinghua, in Fujian, he served as the educational intendant of the neighboring county of Huian before the Ming collapsed.²³ Although little is known about his subsequent actions and whereabouts, his area of movement largely fell within the jurisdiction of the Prince of Lu. It would be safe to assume that Chen had upheld this regime in some capacity. Longfei *xinmao*, or 1652, the year that appears at the end of his preface, was likewise characterized by fluidity in the political situation.²⁴ Faced with relentless Manchu attacks, coupled with severe internal discord, the Prince of Lu and his major commanders and officials abandoned his coastal bases. They fled for the security of Xiamen, farther south along the Fujian littoral, where they sought refuge with the maritime mogul Zheng Chenggong (1624–62), or Koxinga.²⁵ Because Koxinga paid homage to the distant Yongli Emperor (b. 1623, r. 1646–62), whose reign mostly involved fleeing the Manchus

in southwestern China (see Swope's chapter nineteen), the warlord would eventually persuade the Prince of Lu to abandon all imperial pretensions and accept his calendar.²⁶ Viewed in this context, Chen Suijie's use of Longfei would provide the maximum leeway to adapt to the rapidly changing external situation without offending the sensibilities of either of the two loyalist factions.

Tombstone inscriptions uncovered in Jieshi, on the eastern Guangdong coastline, provide additional substantiation for the connection between political instability and alternative dating systems. Among them were the graves of two prominent local gentry, Lu Tishen (1570–1637) and his son, Lu Duan (1592–1667), a renowned anti-Qing resistance commander. As the inscriptions indicate, members of their clan buried the elder Lu in Longfei *yiyou* (1645) and the younger one in Longfei *renzi* (1672). In addition, the tombs of nearly all of the other prominent local surnames in nearby villages from this period also bore this dating system.²⁷

Chen Shouji believes that it represented the reign name of the brothers Su Cheng (d. 1648) and Su Li (d. 1664), who dominated eastern Guangdong and monopolized its commercial networks from the 1640s to 1660s.²⁸ However, the two men never wholeheartedly espoused the restoration of the Ming. One key reason for their hesitation was their fierce competition with the avowedly Ming loyalist crusader Koxinga over territory and overseas linkages. Throughout their careers, Su Cheng and, after his death in 1648, Su Li, oscillated among establishing an independent dynasty and submission to a Qing court that granted them broad autonomy so long as they helped it clear the coastal areas of its rivals.²⁹ Combined with their class-based antagonism and abusive behavior toward the large gentry clans, they were hardly the type of rulers that an ardent Ming loyalist like Lu Duan had in mind.³⁰

Moreover, the Su grip over Jieshi and other parts of eastern Guangdong was far from stable. In fact, the town and its adjacent areas came under attack and changed hands quite frequently over the 1650s, alternating among the brothers, Koxinga, other Ming loyalists such as Li Dingguo, (discussed in Swope's chapter nineteen), the Qing, and local magnates, and often in rapid succession. The Qing managed to exterminate Su Li in 1664. Yet, a year later, Koxinga's son and successor, Zheng Jing (1642–81), took advantage of the relative power vacuum to establish smuggling depots for the benefit of his regime, now headquartered in Taiwan, which his father had seized from the Dutch in 1662. It took several sustained offensives, along with a brutal evacuation of the population of the entire southeastern coastline, for the Qing to ultimately establish definitive authority over eastern Guangdong

during the 1680s.³¹ The years when the tomb inscriptions were made—1645 and 1672—fell squarely within this period of chaos. Despite the prevailing sentiment of local gentry households like the Lu for the Ming, they could not afford to adopt a concrete reign name, such as Yongli, out of fear of retribution once another hostile party seized control. Longfei would appear to be the most optimal and “safe” choice that would allow for the expression of irredentism through its abstraction from political realities.

THE ZHENG FAMILY’S MARITIME SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

Resistance was one of many strategies adopted by Chinese elites when faced with disorder and the undesirable specter of alien rule. The dynastic transition also prompted a mass exodus of refugees to Japan and Southeast Asia. In their newly adopted lands, these exiles initially expressed their political loyalties in public. As a highly formal means of honoring deceased relatives and ensuring an accurate calendar of rituals in their memory, ancestral tablets found in shrines and temples placed great emphasis on the precision and legitimacy of dates, including the reign name. By examining them, one can acquire a sense of the prevailing conceptions of imperial time among a particular diasporic community.³²

Hibino Takeo has done extensive work with the tablets stored at the Pavilion of Azure Clouds (Qingyunting) at Melaka. Among the many that he has examined, the one belonging to Zheng Zhenshu (1586–1648) particularly stood out for him. Hibino notes with surprise the date of his death, “Longwu *wuzi*, intercalary third month, third day, *wei* time” (early afternoon of April 25, 1648). It was inscribed by his son Zheng Fangyang (1632–77), the first *kapitan* of the local Chinese community appointed by the Dutch East India Company (VOC), the colonial authorities in charge of the port. This reign name refers to a Ming loyalist regime established at Fuzhou in 1645 with the military support of Koxinga’s father, Zheng Zhilong (d. 1661). Only a year later, however, Manchu forces seized the city, carried off Zhilong to Beijing as a hostage, and hunted down the imperial pretender.³³ So why use the Longwu reign name to mark 1648, after the court had already ceased to exist? Certainly, two years would have been sufficient time for news of its collapse to travel to Melaka.

Hibino believes that Zheng Zhenshu, a native of Zhangzhou, within the sphere of Longwu control, had fled his home to avoid the Manchu

onslaught and continued to uphold the reign name out of sentimental political attachment to the regime. I would like to introduce another possible reason that has little directly to do with the hapless pretender himself. In fact, Koxinga continued to use the Longwu reign name until 1648, the year of Zheng Zhenshu's death, when the mogul dropped it in favor of recognizing the Yongli court. Moreover, the Zhangzhou area served as a first line of defense and sphere of influence for Koxinga's island base at Xiamen.³⁴ Thus, it is very likely that Zhenshu and his son participated as intermediaries in the Zheng family's vast maritime trading network, responsible for handling commercial interactions between Melaka and the China coast and ensuring smooth ties with the Dutch. For Fangyang, this position would overlap with his appointment by the Dutch as *kapitan* of the Chinese community. As Tonio Andrade has shown, double allegiances proved to be a common arrangement for prominent Chinese throughout the VOC's possessions in maritime East Asia.³⁵ It worked so long as relations with the Zheng family remained amicable.

Likewise, we can safely assume that the Yongli reign name, adopted by Koxinga to replace Longwu, gained wide currency among Chinese communities outside China from the late 1640s to late 1670s. He and his descendants continued counting in its dates for almost twenty years after Yongli perished at the hands of Wu Sangui in 1662. At the very least, merchants operating under the Zheng banner used it, as did their business associates at ports across maritime East Asia, already a sizable proportion of the diaspora since the family controlled some seventy to eighty percent on average of all Chinese shipping in the region.³⁶ In fact, Koxinga and Zheng Jing specially had calendars published and distributed by an official printing press under their auspices. Junks affiliated with the family would carry these onboard during their mercantile missions.³⁷ As Robert Batchelor correctly notes, calendars formed "part of a larger effort to stabilize and redefine temporal and commercial system for the benefit of Chinese merchants who had complex credit relations . . . from Nagasaki to Banten."³⁸ Its use allowed for the standardization of their business practices, such as keeping of accounts, thereby facilitating Zheng influence over their activities across maritime East Asia. Conceivably, the *kapitan* Zheng Fangyang adopted the calendar as well at Melaka, although concrete evidence remains lacking.

In addition, the Yongli calendars served as tools of diplomacy in the form of official gifts to foreign kingdoms. These were the ones that have been protected from the vicissitudes of political transformations and thus preserved to the present day. Yang Yongzhi records a calendar dated Yongli 21 (1667) that was presented by the Zheng rulers to the

Korean king and is now preserved in a Japanese private collection.³⁹ Robert Batchelor speaks of another one with the date of Yongli 25 (1671) found within the Bodleian Library of Oxford University. It was the only surviving specimen out of an entire batch of one hundred calendars sent to the English East India Company headquarters of Banten via the company's trading post in Taiwan in January 1671 and November 1672. Such efforts to print and disseminate the name of an already deceased emperor formed, in the words of Batchelor, "part of a regional and indeed global propaganda effort to convince the world of the legitimacy of Zheng Jing's regime against the Qing."⁴⁰ The Yongli calendar and reign name thus epitomized the consolidation of Chinese across maritime East Asia into a unified political bloc with a coherent proto-nationalist identity centered around the affirmation of Han Chinese ethnic sentiments and rejection of Manchu rule.

It was precisely the formidable military and economic clout that the Zheng came to wield as a result that proved so unsettling for many rulers in the region. In 1662, Koxinga seized control of the Dutch colony of Taiwan, and established on the resource-rich island a base of operations on a much larger scale than Xiamen. The offensive prompted the Qing and the VOC to forge an alliance with the strategic aim of containing Zheng expansionary designs and curtailing the family's access to product sources and markets. Even as the Qing court initiated a brutal evacuation of the Chinese littoral, Dutch naval vessels enforced a stringent blockade on the high seas, intercepting and plundering junks caught without the company's passes. In addition, both parties put heavy pressure upon countries throughout the region to comply with their objectives. Nonetheless, many diasporic traders continued to maintain their connections to the Zheng with either covert or open support from native rulers.⁴¹ However, by the late 1670s, the overseas influence of the family had declined rapidly in the wake of a series of disastrous campaigns against the Manchus in southeastern China. Not long afterward, in 1683, the regime itself came to an end when the Zheng formally surrendered their stronghold of Taiwan to the Qing.

MING LOYALISM WITHOUT THE MING

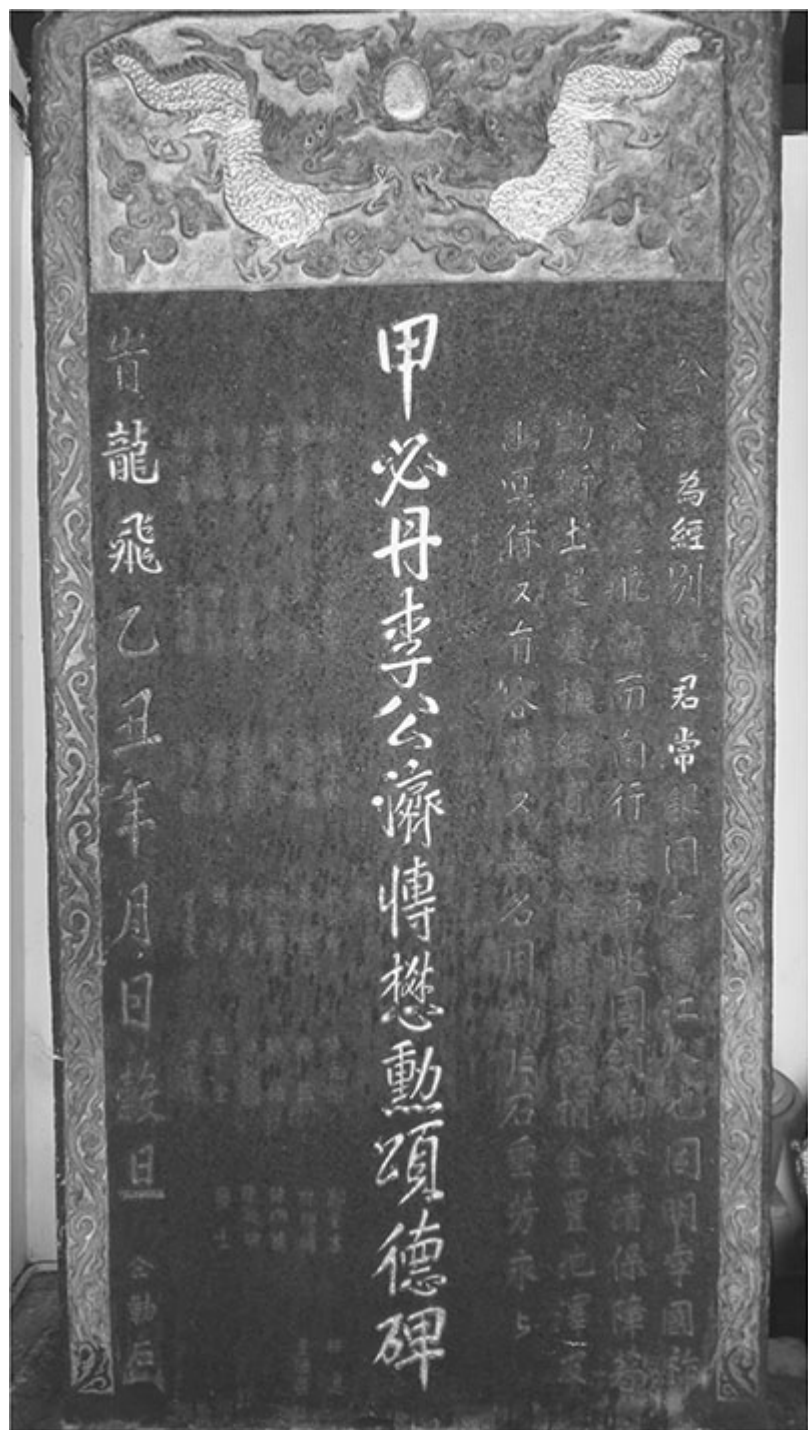


Figure 14.2 Stele extolling the merits of Li Weijing, kapitan of Melaka, at the Pavilion of Azure Clouds. It was erected on an auspicious day in Longfei *yichou* (1685)

The five or six years preceding Taiwan's surrender already witnessed a mass exodus of refugees, primarily from the Zheng sphere of influence in Fujian and Guangdong, seeking asylum at the ports where they had once traded or had relatives.⁴² With their patron and main source of protection on the brink of disintegration, they faced an uncertain future entirely at the mercy of their adopted lands. The exiles had to strike a delicate balance, on the one hand expressing their irredentism and homesickness for a lost homeland, while dissociating themselves from the Zheng, a connection that now threatened to be a severe, even life-threatening, liability. An examination of historical sources, along with epigraphic evidence from the Ming loyalist emigre bastions of Melaka and Phố Hiến in northern Vietnam bear out this conjecture.

First, let us revisit *kapitan* Zheng Fangyang of Melaka, who recorded the Longwu reign name on his father's ancestral tablet. The inscription on his tombstone at Bukit China, the official Chinese cemetery, which his children erected for him one year after his death in 1677, displayed the Longfei and *ganzhi* combination.⁴³ The same dating system can be found at the Pavilion of Azure Clouds, in particular, on a stele (Figure 14.2) commissioned in 1685 to commemorate his successor, Li Weijing (1614–88), and a plaque honoring a later *kapitan*, Zeng Qilu (1643–1718), in 1706.⁴⁴



Figure 14.3 Portrait of Kapitan Li Weiing in the robe and cap of a Ming official

Evidently, the VOC's antagonism toward the Zheng, especially after the loss of Taiwan, meant that its handpicked Chinese community leaders in a key colonial outpost like Melaka had to avoid any semblance of ties to the family, including use of the Yongli reign name. Otherwise, they risked confiscation of their privileges and property, and financial ruin.

Nonetheless, they continued to display their loyalty to the Ming in other forms. For instance, a portrait of Li Weijing hangs on the wall of a side hall within the Pavilion of Azure Clouds (see [Figure 14.3](#)).



FIGURE 14.4 Plaque hung at the entrance to the Đông Đô Quảng Hội at Phố Hiến. The left-hand side indicates that it was erected in Longfei gengzi, at the height of spring. The exact year is unclear. It could be 1660, 1720, 1780, or even 1840. Since the current building dates from the eighteenth century, the plaque probably refers to some year during that period

He is shown dressed in the long, flowing robes and formal rectangular headdress of a Ming official, in stark contrast to the tight riding jackets and circular caps worn by Han subjects under Manchu rule in China. A statuette of Zeng Qilu and his wife also displays them in similar garb. Zeng's ancestral tablet describes him as a "righteous individual fleeing misfortune from the former Ming (*gu Ming binan yishi*)," while the stele in his honor records his "inability to fit into the mainstream," a veiled reference to the customs and institutions of the Qing, and therefore choosing to "flee misfortune in Melaka."⁴⁵ Zeng took care to describe the fallen dynasty in the past tense, thereby implying no current political agenda.

Vietnam, on account of its geographic and cultural proximity to China, witnessed the largest influx of Ming loyalist refugees. At Phố Hiến, the maritime gateway to Hanoi, seat of the northern Vietnamese state of Tonkin, the Longfei dating convention could be found wherever Chinese communal organizations were housed. I personally visited some of them, including the Bắc Hòa Buddhist temple, the Đông Đô Quảng Hội (Figure 14.4), a compatriot guild hall (*huiguan*) for Guangdong natives, and the ancestral shrine of the Ôn (Wen) clan, originally from Chaozhou, in eastern Guangdong. Longfei appears ubiquitously as the concluding phrase on the plaques outside and inside those buildings, whether hanging on the main gate or central altarpiece, in isolation or as part of a couplet.

Because the sixty-year *ganzhi* cycle, rather than a precise year, follows Longfei, it is not always clear when a particular epigraphic material was created. According to Châu Hải, the origins of the Chinese communal institutions themselves can be traced back to a few decades before or during the dynastic transition of the mid-seventeenth century.⁴⁶ However, many of the actual buildings appear to be of more recent provenance, probably the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, an observation confirmed by Claudine Salmon. Therefore, the dates on the plaques and erection of steles should more appropriately refer to the later periods. In 1993, during a visit to the shrine to the sea goddess Mazu, a guild for Fujian merchants, Salmon discovered a no longer extant stele indicating Longfei *jiawu* as the year of creation, which could translate to 1654, 1714, 1774, or even 1834. Based upon a comparison of several more precisely dated epigraphic materials inside the Đông Đô Quảng Hội nearby, she infers that a plaque bearing Longfei *wuzi* would yield an equivalent of 1768.⁴⁷ A stele that I examined on the wall opposite to the same assembly hall explicitly listed the Western calendar year of 1944 together with Longfei *jiashen*.



Figure 14.5 Chinese identifying themselves as subjects of the Great Ming among the list of donors to the Chuông Temple, Phổ Hiến. The stele dates from 1707



Figure 14.6 Mid twentieth-century stele chronicling the history of the Ôn at the clan shrine in Phố Hiến

Just like in Melaka, the appearance of this convention on steles and plaques serves as one of several vehicles for the expression of Ming loyalist sentiments. Steles found on the grounds of several Buddhist temples in Phố Hiến list many Chinese donors among those who contributed to their upkeep and restoration. These inscriptions date to the first two decades of the eighteenth century, as clearly indicated in the reign name of the Vietnamese ruler. Most strikingly, the name of each Chinese donor is prefaced by “Great Ming” (Figure 14.5). Then come the native places of the donors, primarily in Fujian and Guangdong, followed by their names and those of their spouses and, at times, their commercial firms. These individuals undoubtedly constituted the membership of their respective provincial guild halls, whether the Mazu shrine or Đông Đô Quảng Hội.

A stele located inside the Ôn clan shrine of a more recent, mid-twentieth century, provenance (Figure 14.6) proudly boasts that their lineage was one of the original Ming loyalist families in Phố Hiến, having settled down in the late seventeenth century to escape the turmoil back home in Chaozhou.

The persistence of Ming loyalist memory and identity among descendants of the original exiles had much to do with policies enacted by the Vietnamese regimes during the dynastic transition in China. The Lê Dynasty (1428–1788), the nominal ruling house of the country to which both Tonkin and its bitter rival in the center-south, Đàng Trong, pledged fealty, formally switched its allegiance from the Ming to the Qing in 1660. However, the Zheng had viewed Vietnam as an important destination for trade and a rear base to conduct military intelligence on Qing affairs and communicate with the Yongli court in southwestern China.⁴⁸ Moreover, as the war effort increasingly turned against them, the country and its sparsely populated peripheries became safe havens for military units fleeing the Manchu advance. Accordingly, the Lê court faced heavy pressure from its new tributary overlord to curtail the activities of the family’s political and mercantile network.

In 1666, Qing forces crossed the border in an unsuccessful attempt to apprehend several pirate commanders and Zheng associates from the neighboring Leizhou peninsula in Guangdong who had sought refuge with a local magnate.⁴⁹ After Taiwan surrendered in 1683, the Qing commander Shi Lang (1621–96), dispatched a naval expedition under his subordinate, Chen Ang, that visited Nagasaki and ports across Southeast Asia for a period of five years. While the stated purpose of the mission was to persuade Zheng remnants to return to China, its true intentions probably involved seeking intelligence on their whereabouts in preparation for future measures.⁵⁰ In 1688, soon after the return of

the fleet, the governor of Guangdong undoubtedly acted upon the acquired information when he wrote to the lord of Đàng Trong in Huế, requesting the ruler to initiate a campaign against an exiled Zheng contingent based in the Mekong River Delta. The troops, under the command of Chen Shangchuan (1655–1720), Yang Yandi (d. 1688), and several other associates, had taken refuge in this fertile but sparsely populated frontier of Cambodia after their defeat by Qing fleets in 1681. Under their supervision, the colony had come to consist of prosperous agricultural settlements and urban markets. They also controlled the profitable and strategic trade routes along the northern end of the Gulf of Thailand.⁵¹

In response to the proactive and discomfiting interest taken by Qing authorities toward dissent against the new dynasty in China's peripheries, both Vietnamese states, as southern neighbors of the giant, had no choice but to restrict the activities of the Ming loyalist exiles. Tonkin placed them under closer supervision by confining their presence to a select number of ports, including Phố Hiến, along with a special quarter outside the city walls of Hanoi.⁵² Although much less drastic, Đàng Trong categorized Ming loyalists according to a separate registry of the population and assigned them to special villages under the leadership of headmen appointed from among them. To date, the earliest epigraphic documentation of these Minh Hương (incense or legacy of the Ming) communities comes from Hội An, central Vietnam's premier port for overseas trade, and dates to the 1650s. In contrast to Tonkin, they enjoyed exemption from taxation and labor, and were eligible for bureaucratic office.⁵³

At the same time, the Đàng Trong rulers launched an invasion of the Mekong Delta in the late 1680s with the aim of expanding their territory while satisfying Qing demands to prevent their southern frontier from becoming a new, independent Ming loyalist stronghold after Taiwan. In 1690, after defeating Yang Yandi's forces and securing the submission of Chen Shangchuan, Đàng Trong established a military outpost at Saigon and concentrated all of the Chinese in the city and nearby settlements into a Minh Hương quarter.⁵⁴ Although intended to ensure closer supervision over the activities of the exiles, the policies enacted by the Vietnamese states also had the effect of preserving their identity as a coherent community long after their political loyalties had ceased to be relevant. In fact, aspects of their customs and rituals continue to be practiced to the present day.

In sum, as the examples of Melaka and Phố Hiến have shown, the Longfei dating system found on steles, plaques, and tombstones undoubtedly represents a statement of defiance, a refusal to recognize

Qing rule. This stance becomes even clearer when one examines it in conjunction with other epigraphic and textual evidence that clearly indicate an attachment to the Ming. However, Longfei was also an ambiguous, muted symbol of resistance. The huge influence that the Qing court wielded over its vassals and other countries across maritime East Asia forced Ming loyalist exiles to play it safe lest they risk reprisals, military or otherwise. Thus, the use of Longfei allowed for an abstract expression of identification with the fallen dynasty and ethnic Han values while dissociating themselves from the most powerful and active resistance movement in the region: the Zheng, together with their Yongli calendar.

TOWARD ACCOMMODATION WITH THE QING

After the early eighteenth century, Longfei's appearance in epigraphic and historical records decreased drastically. On the one hand, with the elimination of the Zheng and their holdout of Taiwan in 1683, the chances of a dynastic restoration even in the distant future appeared ever more remote. Perhaps a bigger factor was the Qing court's decision to lift its longstanding ban on overseas trade, which triggered a massive wave of emigration from China in numbers that readily overwhelmed the previous outflow of Ming loyalist refugees. Primarily from Fujian and Guangdong, just like their predecessors, they flocked to destinations across Southeast Asia, from the already established and busy ports to the sparsely populated interior. As merchants, sailors, and laborers, they fulfilled crucial economic niches in long-distance junk trade, mining, agriculture, and natural resource extraction. Historians, such as Leonard Blussé and Carl Trocki, have aptly characterized the century that followed the Qing opening of the seas as a "Chinese century" in maritime East Asia and the global economy.⁵⁵



Figure 14.7 The tombstone of Lin Er, known locally as Ta Khun Lok, Chinese governor of Nakhon Si Thammarat. The date of the inscription, which is covered by the colorful decorations, appears on the right-hand side: Kangxi *guimao*, second month of spring, or sometime in March 1663

These Qing Chinese immigrants and settlers were, in large part during this period, content with their political status, reflected in their use of the reign names of their Manchu rulers. Among the first documented instances of the new dynasty's dating system outside China was at Nakhon Si Thammarat, in southern Thailand. On a remote country road outside the city, I discovered the grave of Lin Er, also known as Ta Khun Lok, a native of Putian, Fujian (Figure 14.7).

According to a description of him found in the Nakhon Si Thammarat Museum, he had arrived in the late 1640s, and soon became a prominent autonomous vassal charged to rule the city by the Siamese kings in Ayutthaya. The inscription on the tombstone, erected shortly after his death, indicates the year of Kangxi *guimao* (1663). Lin had immigrated to Siam before the advent of the harsh Qing maritime blockade. Moreover, as an ethnic Chinese governor subordinate to Ayutthaya, which officially paid tribute to the Qing starting from 1651, he had to adopt its reign name, regardless of his actual political stance.⁵⁶

However, this dating system only appeared in a sustained manner abroad soon after the lifting of the ban in 1684. At Hôi An, Claudine Salmon has uncovered some of the earliest instances of its use among the post-Ming diaspora: a bell inscribed with Kangxi 27 (1688), as well as an incense burner bearing the year of Kangxi 28 (1689). Both were

made to order in workshops outside Guangzhou by merchants and donated to a prominent temple at the Vietnamese port. In subsequent decades, Qing reign names would proliferate rapidly to become the dominant method of recording dates among overseas Chinese across maritime East Asia until the mid-nineteenth century. For the earlier wave of Ming loyalist refugees and their descendants, cordial ties with the Qing and its subjects became essential for maintaining profitable commercial ties to product sources and markets in China. At the same time, because of a shared cultural background, many of the exiled clans found themselves charged by their adopted countries to deal specifically with the burgeoning communities formed by these new traders and settlers. The Minh Huong of Vietnam, for instance, often served as port officials responsible for levying duties and interpreting on behalf of Chinese junk crews.⁵⁷

Forced to swallow the reality of a strong and prosperous High Qing state that would not go away anytime soon, the loyalists and their descendants opted to adopt its conventions even while keeping their political sentiments private. Melaka provides a typical and well-preserved example of their pragmatic attitude. In contrast to Zheng Fangyang and the earlier *kapitans*, their descendants and successors openly embraced the Qing symbols of legitimacy. The ancestral tablet that Li Weijing's son erected for him inscribed his year of death as Kangxi 27 (1688). The one for Zeng Xiankui, who followed Zeng Qilu as *kapitan*, not only listed the reign names of the dynasty, but also prefaced his name with the two characters of "Huang Qing," a proclamation that he was a Qing imperial subject.⁵⁸ The following years witnessed the proliferation of this dating system on plaques and steles both at the Pavilion of the Azure Clouds and Bukit China. The inscriptions featured the calligraphy of the *kapitans* and other community elders, as well as prominent gentry and officials from their native places in China, who were specially invited to contribute, thereby granting the two sites a greater sense of prestige and authority.

Nonetheless, the Ming loyalist legacy continued to weigh heavily upon the overseas Chinese at Melaka. Although not widely emphasized after *kapitan* Zeng Qilu's term of office, this latent heritage appeared in the open once again in the form of a stele commemorating the renovation of the Pavilion of the Azure Clouds. It was recorded by Qiu Huajin, who closed off his contribution with the year of Longfei *xinyou* (1801). Although I could not locate any other information related to him, he evidently hailed from a clan with significant local influence, since the donors to the renovation listed on the stele included many sharing his surname. His decision to utilize Longfei, especially in a public arena that would usually demand a more formal dating system, indicates that at

least some of the prominent old families in Melaka remained opposed to the recognition of Qing rule in any form even over a century after the dynastic transition. More significantly, the stele heaped fulsome praise upon the *kapitan*, Cai Shizhang (1750–1802), for his leadership and contributions to the community, and places him at the top of the list of donors. While Cai’s own inscriptions on tombstones and steles uniformly observe Qing conventions, his appearance in Qiu’s record indicates, at the very least, the headman’s tolerance of Ming loyalist expression, a sign of its continued popularity among a fairly wide segment of the population.⁵⁹



Figure 14.8 Couplet on the main entrance to the central hall of the Mạc ancestral shrine at Hà Tiên. The inscription reads, from right to left: “In order to preserve our clan’s skin and hair, and fulfill our duties of loyalty and filial piety, we floated to a distant land beyond the tempestuous waves, where we could die [unmolested].”



Figure 14.9 Grave of Mạc Thiên Tứ's wife, a Vietnamese woman of the Nguyễn clan, erected by her children at the Bình San Cemetery in Hà Tiên. Perhaps because she had married into the Mạc family, the inscription intriguingly categorizes her as a subject of the Imperial Ming (Huang Ming). Note that the date, which appears on the lower right-hand side of the tombstone, only records the year in *ganzhi*. It is unclear the exact Western calendar year referred to by *renshen*

Even more than Melaka, pro-Ming discourse formed an integral part

of the governance and daily life of Hà Tiên, a regime founded in the late seventeenth century by the Chinese exile Mạc Cửu (1655–1735). The fortunes of the polity, situated in the southwestern Mekong River Delta and neighboring Cambodia, Đàng Trong, and Siam, reached a peak after his son, Mạc Thiên Tứ (c. 1718–80), inherited the reins of power in 1735. For much of the eighteenth century, its main port became the largest transshipment hub for the flows of rice, tin, human labor, and other commodities between China and Southeast Asia.⁶⁰ The chronicle of the Mạc family, compiled and edited by a close adviser and subordinate of Tứ in the early nineteenth century, begins with Cửu's refusal to submit to Qing rule. According to the narrative, he had fled his native Leizhou peninsula, in western Guangdong, in 1671 since he “could not bear the devastation wrought by the Manchu barbarians” upon his native place.⁶¹ The clan shrine in Hà Tiên likewise features a prominently placed couplet that praises him and his son for “preserving hair and skin intact” (Figure 14.8).

Their refusal to adopt the Manchu queue, a decree imposed upon Qing subjects on the pain of death, allowed their family to fulfill the cardinal Confucian virtues of filial piety—preventing harm to the bodies bequeathed by parents—and loyalty to the fallen Ming.



Figure 14.10 Grave of Mạc Cửu at the Bình San Cemetery in Hà Tiên, erected by his son Tứ in the fall of the Longfei *yimao* year, which

The residents of Hà Tiên, especially the elite circle around the Mạc leaders, continued to wear their hair long and don the caps and gowns of the old China. Travelers from the Qing noted with shock and curiosity these “customs and institutions of a foregone age.”⁶² Confronted by sights at once familiar and strange, they must have felt that their journey to this distant land also brought them back to their own past. This sense of timelessness also pervades the clan cemetery at Binh San Hill, at the rear of the shrine. Many of the tombstones that litter its slopes bear the preface of Imperial Ming (Huang Ming) before the title and name of the buried occupant, a relative, adviser, or retainer in the service of the Mạc (see [Figure 14.8](#) for one example).

Others, such as the inscriptions on the graves of Mạc Cửu ([Figure 14.9](#)) and Mạc Thiên Tứ, do not make any reference to the former dynasty, but mark the dates in the Longfei format.

As in Melaka and Phố Hiến, the two expressions never appeared together. Inscriptions with an explicitly loyalist statement would only have *ganzhi* years, while Longfei-dated tombstones were either politically neutral or recognized the unified Vietnamese Nguyễn Dynasty (1802–1945), which came to control Hà Tiên during the early nineteenth century. Moreover, Longfei inscriptions primarily appeared on the tombs of the top leaders, including Cửu and Tứ.

This dissociation had much to do with Hà Tiên’s geopolitical position in maritime East Asia. Its very livelihood as an emporium depended upon robust trading links with China, especially access to the lucrative markets of Guangzhou. Meanwhile, the port polity paid vassalage to *Đàng Trong*, itself highly pro-Qing in its outlook and policies, in exchange for military protection from this powerful neighbor against hostile forces from Siam and Cambodia.⁶³ Accordingly, despite being the most independent and steadfastly Ming loyalist community, Hà Tiên went out of its way to avoid antagonizing the Qing. The Longfei dating system served as one means of downplaying the irredentism of the leadership, which had to operate within the reality of an East Asian hierarchy anchored in the Qing-centered tributary order. Mạc Thiên Tứ also actively cultivated contacts among gentry and lower officials in the Guangzhou area, inviting them at his own expense to his realm as guests of honor. He started a poetry club that maintained a lively dialogue in verse between literati in Hà Tiên, *Đàng Trong*, and China. Tứ was careful to ensure the apolitical nature of these exchanges. Indeed, his preface to an anthology of contributions by different poets in celebration

of the ten scenic views of Hà Tiên was dated solely in *ganzhi*.⁶⁴

Mạc Thiên Tứ went so far as to proactively make himself and his polity useful for the Qing court. From the 1740s to 1770s, Hà Tiên became China's premier source of information and intelligence on developments across Southeast Asia. His trusted merchants would regularly report any notable findings to the office of the governor-general in Guangzhou. If the information obtained was deemed of strategic interest, the Qing authorities would invite them to Beijing for a personal audience with the Qianlong Emperor or dispatch envoys of their own to Hà Tiên. On one occasion, Tứ even praised the emperor as "a wise and benevolent ruler."⁶⁵ As a fitting sign of where his polity's outward allegiances lie, the chronicle of the Mạc clan listed the Vietnamese and Qing reign names parallel to one another before each entry. Within the same text, the first Chinese characters for Qing and Vietnam, along with their rulers, were always shifted to begin a new line and placed one character above the standard margins.⁶⁶ This typical East Asian literary device, known as "raising the head" (*taidou*), denotes respect and deference for the object of reference.

By the eighteenth century, then, the Ming loyalist exiles and their descendants had successfully made the transition toward objectifying and depoliticizing their irredentism. They divorced it from association with anti-Qing resistance and instead linked it with the inherent cultural and ethnic traits of "Chineseness." As a result, the preservation of traditional Ming dress and hairstyle could become the most authentic fulfillment of the Confucian virtues of loyalty, filial piety, and righteousness, values unable to be realized in China itself because of Manchu desecration. For a people permanently trapped among others, with the homeland as they knew it forever lost, this discourse allowed them to maintain and perpetuate their identity in an overseas setting. The Longfei dating system played a crucial role in toning down the revolutionary implications of Ming loyalism and transforming it into an abstract symbol of defiance. It also enabled the post-Ming diaspora to adapt to the demands of new political allegiances.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter has traced the origins and development of the Longfei dating convention in China and its transplantation abroad. As it has shown, what originally served as a legitimate glorification of the reigning emperor, as well as an informal and auspicious marker of time in private documents and religious incantations, transformed into a statement of political resistance during the seventeenth-century Ming-Qing dynastic

transition. This refusal to recognize Manchu rule can be inferred from the public character of the media upon which Longfei was displayed, the absence of any corresponding Qing reign name, and other manifestations of Ming loyalism related to its appearance. At the same time, however, it represents an ambiguous and “safe” form of dissent, when an open embrace of a specific political cause would prove dangerous for the community in question, whether in China or Southeast Asia.

A careful study of textual and epigraphic references to Longfei on the southeastern Chinese coast and at Melaka, Phố Hiến, and Hà Tiên, the major centers of Ming loyalist activity, provides a valuable window into how the dynastic transition played out in maritime East Asia over the long term. Following a brief period of chaos after the fall of Beijing in 1644, these Chinese communities rallied around Koxinga and his descendants, who exercised commercial domination and political influence over the entire region. However, as the Qing gradually solidified its supremacy over China and deprived the Zheng of their advantage on the seas, the resulting wave of Ming loyalist refugees who scattered across maritime East Asia grew more cautious about the open expression of their ideals. Eventually, the need for continued access to the Chinese market, along with the mass arrival of immigrants and traders from Qing-held territory, forced the earlier generation of exiles to consciously dilute their irredentist sentiments of the potential for revolutionary action.

Even before the final loyalist stronghold of Taiwan surrendered in 1683, this process had already started to occur under the Zheng. As Batchelor notes, their continued use of the Yongli calendar for decades after the actual pretender had perished “reframe and repeat the problem of sovereignty as something divorced from the rituals and instruments of the court itself.” In other words, adherence to Ming loyalism increasingly came to entail an abstract identification with the cultural features and institutions that make up the Han ethnicity rather than solely a focus upon the dynastic house. More than Yongli, Longfei, coupled with the sixty-year rotation of *ganzhi* years, provided the ideal ambiguity for the perpetuation of this “strange timeless quality” among exiled communities abroad after the demise of all credible anti-Qing resistance in China.⁶⁷ It provided a concrete means for what Anthony Reid asserts as the “legitimation, for the first time, of a Chinese identity outside China.”

The depoliticization of Ming loyalism, even as it contributed to ethnic exclusivism, nonetheless endowed the exiled diaspora with sufficient flexibility to readily embrace their adopted societies and rulers. They

also dealt amicably with Qing subjects and recognized the dynasty's supremacy in maritime East Asia. Their familiarity with both sides allowed them to exercise a tremendous degree of influence over Chinese communities abroad, despite being inundated by the new wave of Qing settlers and traders after 1684. Their ethnic exclusivity spread through these means among the wider diasporic population, and it was undoubtedly more deeply held than political allegiances.⁶⁸ Accordingly, when Qing rule began to disintegrate during the late nineteenth century, it is no surprise that overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia would rally around the Ming loyalist banner once again and revive it as a potent political statement. In the name of restoration, they provided crucial support for the Taiping Rebellion, secret society uprisings, and finally, the revolution of 1911 that toppled the imperial system in China.⁶⁹

NOTES

- 1 Wolfgang Franke and Chen Tieh Fan, *Chinese Epigraphic Materials in Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1982), vol. 1, 223–5.
- 2 John E. Wills, Jr., “A Very Long Early Modern? Asia and Its Oceans, 1000–1850,” *Pacific Historical Review* 83.2 (2014), 201.
- 3 Rao Zongyi, “Zhongwai guanxi shi: Xingma huawen beike jinian.” *Rao Zongyi ershi shiji xueshu wenji*. Vol 7. Taipei: Xin wenfeng, 2004, 831–963.
- 4 Claudine Salmon, “Réfugiés Ming dans les Mers du sud vus à travers diverses inscriptions (ca. 1650–ca. 1730),” *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient* 90–91 (2003), 204–5, and Li Qingxin, “‘Haishang Ming chao’: Mao shi Hexian zhengquan de Zhonghua tese,” *Xueshu yuekan* 10 (2008), 133–8.
- 5 Piero Corradini, “The Barbarian States in North China,” *Central Asiatic Journal* 50.2 (2006), 215.
- 6 Rao, *Xingma huawen beike*, 4.
- 7 Liu Yongxian, *Hanjiang shi bei* (Guangzhou: Jinan daxue chubanshe, 2012).
- 8 See the contracts in *Taiwan sifa renshibian* (Taipei: Economic Research Office, Bank of Taiwan, 1961).
- 9 “Longfei nianhao jiushu,” 7788 shangcheng (2017) http://www.997788.com/pr/detail_auction_4_14316502_0.html. The proliferation of this and other online auction sites in China have allowed many old, unpublished documents previously held in private collections to surface, as their owners now have a platform to market their holdings for a sometimes substantial profit.
- 10 I have determined the broad location where this particular contract was drawn because of its frequent use of the character *cuo* 厓 to refer to a place of residence, a practice unique to the Minnan dialect areas of Fujian and Guangdong.
- 11 Wang Zhenzhong, “Qing dai qianqi Huizhou minjian de richang shenghuo: Yi Ziyuan minjian riyong leishu *Mulu shiliutiao wei li*,” in Chen Feng (ed.), *Ming Qing yilai Changjiang liuyu shehui fazhan shilun* (Wuhan: Wuhan daxue chubanshe, 2006), 706–7.
- 12 Wang Zhenzhong, “Huizhou minjian,” 709.
- 13 Liu Yongxian, *Hanjiang shi bei*.

- 14 Wang Zhenzhong, “Huizhou minjian,” 706.
- 15 See, for instance, *Taiwan sifa renshibian*, 440.
- 16 “Longfei nianhao jiushu,” and Xu Xiaoguang, *Qingshuijiang yu chuantong linye guizede shengtai renlei xuejie du* (Beijing: Zhishi chanquan chubanshe, 2014), 70.
- 17 Charles Wheeler, “Cross-Cultural Trade and Trans-Regional Networks in the Port of Hôï An: Maritime Vietnam in the Early Modern Era” (PhD diss., Yale, 2001), 135–6.
- 18 Rao, *Xingma huawen beike*, 4, and Cheng Zhangcan, *Guke xinquan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2009), 249.
- 19 Wu Jiang, *Leaving for the Rising Sun: Chinese Zen Master Yinyuan and the Authenticity Crisis in Early Modern East Asia* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), 81–108; 243–67.
- 20 Hirakubô Akira, *Shinsan kôtei Ingen zenshû* (Tokyo: Kaimei shoin, 1979), vol. 1, 25.
- 21 For a narrative of the political situation in southern China after the fall of Beijing, see Lynn A. Struve, *The Southern Ming: 1644–1662* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 15–74.
- 22 Zha Jizuo, *Lu chungqiu* (Taipei: Economic Research Office, Bank of Taiwan, 1962), 1, 45.
- 23 Sun Erzhun et al., *Daoguang chongcuan Fujian tongzhi* (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2011), 460.
- 24 Hirakubô, *Ingen*, vol. 1, 33.
- 25 Struve, *Southern Ming*, 114–15.
- 26 Zha, *Lu chungqiu*, 56–7. For a detailed examination of Yongli’s reign and adventures in the southwest, see Kenneth M. Swope, *On the Trail of the Yellow Tiger: War, Trauma, and Social Dislocation in Southwest China During the Ming-Qing Transition* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), chapters 4–7.
- 27 Chen Shouji, “Su Cheng, Su Li lishi ziliao shiyi,” *Lufeng wenshi* 6 (1993), <http://www.lfxcw.gov.cn/623.html>.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 Yang Ying, *Congzheng shilu* (Taipei: Taiwan yinhang, 1958), 4; Cheng Wei-chung, *War, Trade and Piracy in the China Seas, 1622–1683* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 166–7; and Robert Antony, *Like Froth Floating on the Sea: The World of Pirates and Seafarers in Late Imperial South China* (Berkeley, CA: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 2003), 34.
- 30 Chen Shouji, “Su Cheng, Su Li lishi ziliao shiyi.”
- 31 Cheng, *War, Trade and Piracy*, 167. For more on the coastal removal, see Dahpon David Ho, “Sealords Live in Vain: Fujian and the Making of a Maritime Frontier in Seventeenth-century China,” (PhD dissertation, University of California-San Diego, 2011), in particular, 200–297.
- 32 The Longfei title does not appear in these highly formal ritual epigraphs, further substantiation against them being used as reign names. If the deceased did not approve of Qing rule, only the *ganzhi* stems and roots would appear alone on the tablets. See Hibino Takeo, “Marakka no Chainiizu kapitan no keifu,” *Tōnan Ajia kenkyū* 6.4 (1969), 91–3.
- 33 Ibid., 93–4.
- 34 *Haidong yishi* (Taipei: Taiwan yinhang, 1961), 6.
- 35 Zheng Fangyang’s situation is quite comparable to that of He Bin in Taiwan. See

- Tonio Andrade's excellent article on this intermediary and how he profitably played the Zheng and the Dutch to his benefit, "Chinese under European Rule: The Case of Sino-Dutch Mediator He Bin," *Late Imperial China* 28.1 (2007), 1–32.
- 36 Xing Hang, *Conflict and Commerce in Maritime East Asia: The Zheng Family and the Shaping of the Modern World, c.1620–1720* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 265–94.
 - 37 Sŏng Haeun, *Chŏngmi chŏnshinrok*, in Institute for the Translation of Korean Classics (2007). <http://www.itkc.or.kr/MAN/index.jsp>.
 - 38 Robert Batchelor, *London: The Selden Map and the Making of a Global City, 1549–1689* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 188.
 - 39 Yang Yongzhi, *Ming-Qing shiqi Tainan chuban shi* (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju, 2007), 16–17.
 - 40 Batchelor, *London*, 188.
 - 41 The king of Siam, for instance, continued to receive Zheng ships at Ayutthaya, and sent his own vessels to Xiamen, as did the sultan of Banten, theoretically a Dutch vassal. See, Hang, *Conflict and Commerce*, 150–51, 173, 193–4.
 - 42 Anthony Reid, "Flows and Seepages in the Long-term Chinese Interaction with Southeast Asia," in Anthony Reid, ed., *Sojourners and Settlers: Histories of Southeast Asia and the Chinese* (Leonards, NSW, Australia: Allen and Unwin, 1996), 41–2.
 - 43 Hibino, "Marakka no Chainiizu kapitan," 91, and Franke and Chen, *Chinese Epigraphic Materials*, 369.
 - 44 Franke and Chen, *Chinese Epigraphic Materials*, 224–5, 228–9.
 - 45 Hibino, "Marakka no Chainiizu kapitan," 98–9.
 - 46 Châu Hải, "The Chinese in Pho Hien and Their Relations with Other Chinese in Other Urban Areas of Vietnam," in *Pho Hien: The Centre of International Commerce in the XVIIth – XVIIIth Centuries* (Hanoi: Thế Giới, 1994), 210–16.
 - 47 Salmon lists the other two dates as 1768 and 1814. However, they do not fall within the sixty-year sexagenary cycle of *jiawu*, and therefore appear to be in error. See Salmon, "Réfugiés Ming," 188.
 - 48 Niu Junkai and Li Qingxin, "Chinese 'Political Pirates' in the Seventeenth-Century Gulf of Tongking," in Nola Cooke, Li Tana, and James A. Anderson (eds.), *The Tongking Gulf through History* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 137–9.
 - 49 Ibid.
 - 50 Hayashi Shunsai and Ura Ren'ichi (ed.), *Ka'i hentai* (Tokyo: Tōyō bunko, 1958–1959), vol. 1, 431.
 - 51 Hayashi, *Ka'i hentai*, vol. 2, 1127.
 - 52 Cheng, *War, Trade and Piracy*, 214–15.
 - 53 Salmon, "Réfugiés Ming," 181–4.
 - 54 Hayashi, *Ka'i hentai*, vol. 2, 1128 and Trịnh Hoài Đức, *Gia Định thành thông chí* (Hanoi: Education Publishing House, 1998), 205–6.
 - 55 For more on the implications of the "Chinese century" for Southeast Asian and global economic networks, see Leonard Blussé, "The Chinese Century: The Eighteenth Century in the China Sea Region," *Archipel* 58 (1999), 107–29, and Carl Trocki, "Chinese Pioneering in Eighteenth-Century South Asia," in Anthony Reid (ed.), *The Last Stand of Asian Autonomies: Responses to Modernity in the*

Diverse States of Southeast Asia and Korea, 1760–1840 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 83–101.

- 56 Sarasin Viraphol, *Tribute and Profit: Sino-Siamese Trade, 1652–1683* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1977), 11–12.
- 57 Salmon, “Réfugiés Ming,” 183–4, 201.
- 58 Hibino, “Marakka no Chainiizu kapitan,” 101.
- 59 Franke and Chen, *Chinese Epigraphic Materials*, 236–8.
- 60 Li Tana and Paul van Dyke, “Canton, Cancao, and Cochinchina: New Data and New Light on Eighteenth-century Canton and the Nanyang,” *Chinese Southern Diaspora Studies* 1 (2007), 13–18.
- 61 Vũ Thế Doanh (ed.), *Hà Tiên trấn Hiệp trấn Mạc thị gia phả* (Hanoi: World Publishing House, 2006), 93.
- 62 Zhang Tingyu et al. (comp. and ed.), *Qingchao wenxian tongkao* (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1936), 7463.
- 63 For instance, it was a standing policy of the Đàng Trong rulers to treat Qing subjects with favorable trade policies and immunity from capital punishment. See Xu Wentang and Xie Qiyi (eds.), *Da Nan shilu Qing-Yue guanxi shiliao huibian* (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiu yuan, 2000), 7–9.
- 64 Doanh, *Gia phả*, 102–3; Luo Tianchi, *Wushan zhilin*, in Wu Qi, ed., *Qing dai Guangdong biji wuzhong* (Guangzhou: Guangzhou People's Publishing House, 2006), 57–8; and Mạc Thiên Tứ, *An Nam Hà Tiên thập vịnh*, Institute of Hán Nôm Studies A. 441, n. p.
- 65 Li Qingxin, “Mao shi Hexian zhengquan (‘Gangkou guo’) jiqi duiwai guanxi” (“The Mạc Hà Tiên regime [‘Cancao’] and its external relations”), *Haiyang shi yanjiu* (*Research in maritime history*) 5 (2013) 133–5.
- 66 Doanh, *Gia phả*, 129–37.
- 67 Batchelor, *London*, 189.
- 68 Philip Kuhn, *Chinese among Others: Emigration in Modern Times* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), 247–50.
- 69 For more on the overseas contribution to anti-Qing resistance and Chinese nationalism in the context of Singapore during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see David K. Y. Chng, *Heroic Images of Ming Loyalists: A Study of the Spirit Tablets of the Ghee Hin Kongsi Leaders in Singapore* (Singapore: Singapore Society of Asian Studies, 1999).

PART IV

INDIVIDUALS



Approximately two-thirds of the 322 chapters of the *Official History of the Ming Dynasty* (*Ming shi*) are comprised of biographies. In this, the *Ming shi*, like all the dynastic histories, follows the basic organizational pattern first established by the Grand Historian Sima Qian (d. 86 BC) in writing his *Historical Records* (*Shiji*). Sima believed that individuals were at the heart of the historical experience and their stories were essential in explaining the great and small events of the past. Through the study of people one could gain an appreciation for their times and they could be held up as exemplars or castigated as crooks and villains. Above all, history was a mirror, and in its reflection the historian could see the highest values and aspirations of humanity as well as its tragedies and foibles. Moreover, it was the job of the historian to pass moral judgments and to use these to educate future generations, particularly rulers. Thus, one finds biographies of certain archetypes or categories of individuals together such as loyal ministers, chaste widows, venal officials, noble generals, or wandering bandits.¹ Such characterizations reflect broader social and ideological values of Chinese civilization highlighted in various ways throughout this book.

Additionally, Sima, perhaps unusually for his age, recognized that

people from all backgrounds and walks of life could make an impact on the world. So everyone from founding emperors to notable recluses to peasant rebels might find their way into an official history. This method of organizing history truly makes for fascinating and engaging reading as one is often drawn into stories that they might not otherwise realize were interconnected. And the modern reader gets a sense for how people of the age (or at least the era when the work was compiled) connected different individuals, events, movements, and ideas. This reveals much about the workings of society that might not otherwise be apparent from simply reading official chronicles or chronological narratives. The genius of this focus upon individuals was making history come to life through those who lived it. In this part of the book, we follow these principles in discussing the lives (and in one case deaths) of several notable, if not necessarily well-known Ming personages.

This section begins with my own recounting of the tale of Tang Saier, an early Ming rebel who is notable for both her gender and the religious connotations of her uprising. Having been affiliated with religious secret societies himself, the founder of the Ming was quick to prohibit their activities and initiated other controls on religious groups as part of his general reorganization of society. Tang's rebellion in 1420 came at an especially sensitive time as Hongwu's son, Yongle, was in the final stages of finishing the Forbidden City and relocating his capital to Beijing from Nanjing. He was still mired in a costly war in Vietnam, actively sponsoring campaigns into Central Asia against remnants of the Mongol Empire, and seeking to establish his legitimacy after having usurped the throne from his nephew. On top of this, it seems that a combination of fallout from his recent military and building campaigns (which forced people to supply labor taxes) and a series of natural calamities rendered Shandong a veritable tinderbox that Tang set alight.

Her rebellion, therefore, sheds light upon the relationship between dynastic legitimacy and local society in the early Ming. And even if her supposed ties to the nefarious White Lotus Buddhist millenarian sect were largely fabricated by later writers and novelists, Yongle's decision to round up Buddhist nuns across the capital region in the wake of a relatively small uprising demonstrates just how seriously the state regarded the subversive potential of religion. The problems the Ming state experienced in suppressing the revolt, caused in part by jealousy and rivalry between the major military commanders shows some of the structural weaknesses of Ming institutions even in its earliest period of vigor. This was a system where personality and connections mattered a great deal and vying for credit could take precedence over actually completing the task at hand.

The fact that its ringleader was female added yet another interesting dimension to the mix even if the significance of her gender is contested in surviving histories. Nonetheless Tang represents an emerging archetype of the Ming period: the female warrior adept. Female warriors would become staples of popular lore and fiction in the Ming and their inclusion alongside their male counterparts in stories of peasant rebellion befits their characterization as “dangerous,” not unlike their religious counterparts discussed by Anne Wathall earlier.² And Tang’s position as a religious rebel made her doubly threatening. The continuing fascination with her tale later and its embellishment by novelists and short story writers speaks to both the inherent drama of her story and the concerns about heterodoxy and sorcery in late imperial China. It may also be seen as yet another manifestation of the mingling of high and low culture discussed throughout this book. Other rebels might take inspiration from her, whereas moralistic historians could impugn her for using (or faking) sorcery to delude the masses. Yet the fact that stories about her still circulate locally in Shandong nowadays attests to her place in the lexicon of folk heroes.³

From a rather obscure female rebel leader we now direct our attentions towards the man who was undoubtedly the most important philosopher of the Ming period and probably the most influential Neo-Confucian thinker in East Asia in the past five hundred years, Wang Yangming (1472–1529), also known by his original name, Wang Shouren. Through his own doctrine of the “unity of knowledge and action” and via the public lectures of his noted follower, Wang Gen, it would not be an exaggeration to say that Wang Yangming revolutionized Neo-Confucianism in late imperial China, opening the possibility of self-improvement through sustained effort at realizing goodness and morality to the masses.⁴ In chapter sixteen, George L. Israel focuses on Wang’s activities in Chuzhou and Nanjing in the early sixteenth century, which was a formative time in his career as it fell between his punishment and exile to the southwest for running afoul of the powerful eunuch, Liu Jin, and his clique, and Wang’s subsequent success in quelling a rebellion by one of the Ming princes. Much like the literati friends examined by Ying Zhang earlier in this book, Wang stands out for his willingness to put principles into practice and his unfailing efforts to realize the ideals of the Confucian gentleman. Unlike these other figures, however, Wang was also a powerful and original thinker who helped recreate Neo-Confucian principles for a new age with new social realities and new challenges.

Israel’s presentation reveals much about the nature of politics, political assignments and interpersonal relationships in the Ming. Even when relegated (partly by choice) to a relatively unimportant post, Wang

was able to cultivate the Way (*dao*) by teaching and interacting with literati friends. This included holding large gatherings than involved philosophical debates, singing, and dancing, revealing more of the content of literati gatherings traced by Joseph Lam, Hsiao Li-Ling and others in the present volume. As Israel reveals, many of those studying under Wang at this time went on to become prominent officials and teachers themselves, further extending Wang's influence amongst mid- to late-Ming officialdom. And again calling to mind the analysis of Ying Zhang above, one sees how at least some officials truly grappled with the responsibilities of being moral exemplars, reflecting Wang's own emphasis upon the unity of knowledge and action. Likewise, Wang's exhortations to "be genuine" points to both his own tenets and his perception of the problems some had when they worried too much about appearances and political intrigues, thereby obscuring the Way.

Israel's study also indicates the importance of the teacher-student bond in Ming China. One's teacher occupied that role for life and students frequently went back to study under their masters, even when they had fashioned careers and attracted students of their own. And, as seen in the case of Wang Dao, some students rejected their teacher's interpretations and went their own Ways, as it were. We also see how Ming literati continually investigated and debated current intellectual trends as revealed in the ongoing discussions of the value of Daoist and Buddhist teachings. The Ming is known as an era of syncretism; indeed some in the early Qing decried the scholars of the late Ming for losing sight of the proper Confucian Way, thereby hampering their ability to rectify the errors of the state and ultimately contributing to the dynasty's demise.⁵ But Israel's discussion of the debates between Wang and his students over the utility of the non-Confucian teachings adds depth and texture to the world of Ming thought and shows how truly curious intellectuals could see the value in other traditions and appropriated their insights towards the achievement of what might be dubbed Confucian goals. At the same time Wang was careful to explain that he remained true to his Confucian roots in his communications with his followers and friends. After all, being truthful was at the core of Wang's teaching and his life.

In chapter seventeen, Joseph Lam, the foremost historian of Ming music today, offers a delightfully rich glimpse into the musical life of Zhang Dai (ca. 1597–1684), a historian and essayist known for his appreciation of the finest things late-Ming literati life had to offer. While the Ming world is often vividly depicted in art and literature, its sonic components are often glossed over, in part because of the paucity of surviving scores and other musical sources. But Lam reminds us that the Ming world, particularly that of the elites, was a highly musical one, an

observation that is confirmed in our earlier examinations of the theater.

Lam begins by contextualizing Zhang's musical writings, situating them firmly within the political and literary environment of the Ming-Qing transition. For Zhang, memories of his younger days of splendor served both therapeutic and nostalgic ends, while providing wonderful descriptions of literati pursuits for later historians. They also, incidentally, present a stark contrast with the lifestyles of the late Ming peasant such as Li Dingguo, whose story is related below. In reading Lam's accounts of Zhang's celebrations and excesses it is easy to see why the gentry would have been targets for the peasants that experienced so much hardship and deprivation. Lam's analysis further reveals the ways that late Ming elites cultivated the knowledge of the gentleman as a means of fashioning identity and distinguishing themselves from other classes. While certain elements of elite identity could be readily appropriated as discussed by Ivy Lim, others, such as the sort of detailed technical knowledge of music and the intimate familiarity with Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucian philosophical debates, were more distinctively the province of the highly educated elite. Unfortunately, as Lam notes, much is taken for granted in the writings of such elites and it can be difficult for modern readers to tease out all the implications and particulars of the texts. Therefore much must be inferred and triangulated through other sources and it is to Lam's credit that he so adeptly recreates Zhang's world.

One of his more interesting observations concerns how Zhang gained his musical education. It seems that this process of "learning through osmosis" mirrors elite education in other spheres of life. Zhang Dai was surrounded by educated elites and raised amidst wealth and privilege. Learning how to behave as a proper member of his social class was part of the natural process of growing up. In this sense Ming elites were similar to their counterparts elsewhere. Part of this behavior was grounded in organizing and leading local festivals, which often had significant musical components, as we have seen. Additionally, one gets useful insights into class relations as revealed by the discussions of the place of actors and actresses in these gatherings and in literati households. Music thereby becomes yet another important touchstone in social relations and leisure activities of all groups in the Ming world.

Next, in chapter eighteen, Luk Yu-ping takes another interesting approach to studying individuals in the Ming, examining the burial goods of a pair of late Ming Empresses, both of whom were associated with the controversial Emperor Wanli, discussed in the introduction to this volume, whose tomb, Dingling, was considered the most lavish of all the Ming burial palaces. Despite their lofty position in Ming society,

empresses were amongst the most enigmatic figures. Their personalities are often quite difficult to discern, as they did not leave voluminous written records of their lives. The official depictions offered in the dynastic history and other accounts are often terse and filled with formulaic language that frustrates deeper understanding of their lives, motivations, and interests. And unlike their husbands and sons, we do not have a plethora of imperial proclamations and the like to provide some hints of personal agency and character, even if said documents were most often crafted by the emperors' literati advisers.

Relying heavily upon excavation reports published since the 1950s, Luk adds insights from the social and political contexts of the lives of Empresses Xiaoduan and Xiaojing to explore the relationship between status and burial practices in the Ming. In particular we see how ritual protocol clashed with personal feelings as Emperor Wanli was forced to acknowledge the status of one woman for bearing him a son (his eldest and therefore the putative heir) even as his own affections were dominated by another, lesser ranking imperial consort, who bore him three sons and three daughters. Wanli's ongoing struggle with his bureaucrats over the designation of his heir became one of the dominant issues of his reign and it is fascinating to see how its repercussions were felt even after the respective deaths of the principals involved. The concern for observing and even creating correct ritual protocol in the burial of these two empresses, neither of whom was favored by the ruler himself, demonstrates the link between legitimacy and ritual correctness in the Ming. It also provides yet another glimpse into how personal and factional politics came to affect virtually all aspects of political life in the late Ming.

We have touched upon the significance of status and identity throughout this book and Luk's careful analysis of burial goods and their placement underscores these markers in the imperial context. Proof of one's status and position were required in the afterlife but there was apparently a degree of flexibility allowed with respect to the exact decoration of items such as imperial headdresses. Anomalies in the burial goods themselves further suggest that the ambiguous status of these women vis-à-vis the emperor played a role in what was sent with them into the afterlife and where it was placed. The importance of religious symbolism is also evident, particularly with respect to Buddhism, making it another manifestation of the religious syncretism of the Ming. Furthermore, the inclusion of items that may have held personal significance for the women in question reveals that ritual precedents did not dominate everything. There was room for the individual, even in death, and even in such a heavily ritualized space as the imperial burial chamber.

This part of the book ends with an overview of the career of the peasant rebel Li Dingguo (1620–62) in chapter nineteen. Li is striking in that he is perhaps the most celebrated of the late Ming peasant rebel leaders in terms of his personal qualities and he enjoys a very positive reputation in modern historiography that is perhaps only matched by Zheng Chenggong (Koxinga), whose own remarkable story is touched upon by Ivy Lim and Xing Hang herein. While the details of Li's early life are obscure, he joined the notorious peasant rebel Zhang Xianzhong (1606–47) sometime in his early teen years in northwest China, becoming one of Zhang's four adopted sons in a practice that seems to have been fairly widespread at the time. But unlike most of his fellow rebels, Li appears to have had literary inclinations and was well-regarded by both military and civil figures for his knowledge of classical tales, his skill at Chinese chess, and his leadership and strategic acumen. How exactly Li acquired such a wide repertoire of skills is never fully explained in the surviving sources but it speaks to the widespread dissemination of elite culture and values amongst the masses in the late Ming.

After gaining valuable experience following Zhang in his military campaigns across China in the 1630s–40s, Li became one of Zhang's foremost military commanders and advisers when he established his kingdom in Chengdu, Sichuan in 1644. He was supposedly a voice of restraint against Zhang's many excesses and later became the driving force behind the decision of Zhang's surviving lieutenants to cast their lot with the Ming loyalist groups in the late 1640s. It was this decision, coupled with Li's many dazzling military exploits chronicled herein that elevated him to the status of a folk hero over the last fifteen years of his career. Interestingly, through these years and after his death Li was often likened to great Chinese heroes of the past. Many written accounts credit Li himself with perpetuating such comparisons, although these may well be embellishments by literati authors eager to impart their own values and worldviews to their peasant rebel allies. Nonetheless, it does appear that Li was both literate and compassionate towards both his own soldiers (though he was known for strict discipline in the ranks) and the common folk under his charge. These qualities have made him a favorite amongst modern historians.

Also notable with respect to Li's career is his close relationship with the minority peoples of southwest China. Though these groups had clashed repeatedly with central government authorities and Han Chinese settlers, particularly in the last decades of the Ming, they eventually formed a significant segment of the Ming loyalist armies resisting the Qing advance. Li adopted the tactics and military techniques of the minority groups, including the use of elephant cavalry, and is said to

have taken a minority wife, as did some of his fellow peasant rebel commanders in the southwest. Unsurprisingly, this union of Han and minority resistance to “foreign” invasion has been highlighted by modern Chinese scholars eager to advance nationalist agendas. Taken as a whole, Li’s colorful life and eventful career offer a wonderful snapshot of the decline of the Ming and the rise of the Qing. This case study is also a useful entrée into the complicated historiography of the Ming-Qing conflict.

NOTES

- 1 For a study of Sima Qian and his impact on the creation of Chinese history and historiography, see Grant Hardy, *Worlds of Bronze and Bamboo: Sima Qian's Conquest of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).
- 2 See the discussion of female warriors in Victoria Cass, *Dangerous Women: Warriors, Grannies and Geishas of the Ming* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999) 71–86.
- 3 Personal conversation with Dr. Chun-shu Chang, my graduate adviser and a native of Shandong.
- 4 For a short biography of Wang Yangming (under Wang Shou-jen), see *DMB*, 1408–16. On Wang Gen, see *DMB*, 1382–5.
- 5 See Huang Zongxi, *Waiting for the Dawn: A Plan for the Prince*, Trans. by W.T. DeBary (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). For a short biography of Huang Zongxi, see *ECQP*, 255–8.

CHAPTER 15

THE LEGEND OF TANG SAIER



Kenneth M. Swope

PEASANT REBELS IN CHINESE HISTORY

The long history of imperial China is replete with tales of peasant rebels. As long as the odds were for the success of popular uprisings, when times became desperate enough, people would often choose to challenge the authorities, some even with the aim of replacing those figures. And though the cases of truly successful peasant uprisings are relatively few, their example encouraged myriad others. Of course, the Ming was both founded and toppled by peasant rebels.¹ As in other parts of the world, these rebels occupied different, and often conflicting positions in popular culture. While some, such as Li Dingguo discussed below, were canonized as heroes and immortalized in popular stories, plays, and folklore, most were branded enemies of the state, and challengers to the proper and rightful social order. Perhaps the most famous example of the former are the heroes of the Ming dynasty novel *Shui hu zhuan*, usually translated as *The Water Margin*, which depicts the exploits of a group of 108 Robin Hood-like bandits struggling against corrupt Song (960–1279) dynasty officials.² These characters later became among the most beloved figures in Chinese folklore and are still depicted today in comic books, television shows, and popular opera

performances.

Furthermore, some peasant rebels, while initially despised and reviled in popular culture and historiography, later became canonized by the Chinese Communist Party after its assumption of power in 1949. For example, today there is a larger than life statue of the late Ming peasant rebel, the “Dashing Prince” Li Zicheng (1605–45), who seized the Ming capital of Beijing in 1644 as the last Ming emperor was hanging himself behind the Forbidden City. Ironically enough, Li’s statue is quite near the tombs of the Ming emperors, still one of Beijing’s foremost tourist attractions.³

While all of this might not be surprising to historians of other traditions, they might be somewhat startled to learn that China’s tradition of peasant rebels is not the province of men alone. China also has a long tradition of female warriors, rebels, and adepts, ranging from the heroic Mulan to the less well-known Red Lanterns, a female contingent of the Boxer rebels of the late nineteenth century who were supposedly able to combat the pernicious influence of Catholic nuns. As in the West, such women were often imbued with auras of magic and mystery and deemed to have supernatural powers, which enabled them to act unfettered in a world largely dominated by men. The most common role female warriors assumed combined martial arts skills with religious knowledge and placed them firmly within a longstanding tradition of religious beliefs that imperial governments regarded as either legitimating or heterodox, depending on the specific circumstances. It is most likely that such beliefs harken back to ancient pre-literate legends and societies in which women often acted as shamanesses and intermediaries with the spirit world. Indeed, as historian Victoria Cass notes, “Religious adepts or warriors were the typical female recluses . . . These figures were the inside-out of civilization: eccentric, bizarre, iconoclastic; they were the antiliterati whom the literati, along with almost everyone else, believed in.”⁴ Such women conferred healing, transmitted military secrets, warrior’s arts, and even represented alternative sources of legitimacy.⁵ And far from being uncommon, some traditional commentators complained that female warrior mystics were “everywhere, endlessly deluding the masses, causing disaster.”⁶ Indeed as recent popular films, including the academy award nominee *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* have shown us, “female warriors are a staple of popular texts and popular iconography.”⁷ An entire sub-genre of the Chinese *wuxia* films features such warrior women as heroes or villains and it is now commonplace to find examples of such figures in films and television shows.⁸ Their exploits are perhaps less prominent in more restrained dynastic histories and official chronicles, for reasons discussed below. But their potentially subversive presence was nonetheless a

striking feature of the Ming world. In this chapter I will recount and examine the legend of one of the most representative of these female warrior-mystics, the Ming rebel Tang Saier.

AN UNLIKELY REBEL

Tang Saier was a native of Putai district in the eastern part of Shandong province, located in northeast China, opposite the Korean peninsula. Shandong was not particularly rebellious or unruly by Ming standards,⁹ but it would later be the setting for the Boxer Uprising of 1899–1900 and would become a hotbed of sectarian activity attributed by the government to the notorious White Lotus Society in the late Ming.¹⁰ In fact the Japanese scholar Yamane Yukio finds that the reason the Ming state was so threatened by Tang's movement was because the area of her uprising had in fact been a stronghold of White Lotus sectarian activity in the waning years of the Yuan (1279–1368) dynasty.¹¹ Indeed, while the major sources for the rebellion are not explicit in linking the movement to the White Lotus, Yamane believes the frequent references to duplicitous sorcery and the fact that the rebellion occurred in Shandong, which had longstanding sectarian traditions, clearly establish the connection between Tang Saier and the White Lotus, a connection Ming observers would have readily made.¹² Other scholars, such as Barend ter Haar, suggest that the references to White Lotus connections only emerged later in the Ming dynasty, for specific references to that sect in association with Tang Saier are absent from the few surviving early Ming sources.¹³

In fact, other, more mundane reasons have also been put forth for the initial outbreak of the rebellion. It has been suggested that Shandong suffered quite a bit from the recent civil war and that there was a fair amount of lingering economic hardship in the province. There were apparently great famines in the area affected by Tang's rebellion in 1420 and 1425 and there had been locust plagues and other natural disasters in preceding years. The emperor's construction of Beijing created corvée burdens for the locals. As in all eras of the Ming, such problems could easily spark rebellion. They could also cast doubt upon the legitimacy of the monarch.¹⁴ And as dissatisfaction with the government grew, people often found themselves drawn to secret societies, particularly in regions such as Shandong where they were seemingly part of the fabric of local society.

Moreover, given their proven ability to mobilize large numbers of people for anti-governmental activities, these sectarian organizations were understandably greatly feared by the authorities. Going back to the

dynasty's founding, despite his own origins and involvement with secret societies, Zhu Yuanzhang was clearly aware of the dangers sects such as the White Lotus and Red Turbans posed to his fledgling state.¹⁵ Therefore, once Zhu defeated his many rivals and seized the empire from the Mongols he quickly moved to sever his ties with such heterodox groups and outlawed their practices. Accordingly, the early Ming emperors sought to create a perfectly ordered agrarian society stripped of both the ability and the incentive to revolt. Yongle followed his father in this respect and eagerly cultivated the image of the benevolent ruler, even as he discarded many of his father's other injunctions, such as those against costly foreign wars. Additionally, having recently usurped the throne from his nephew, Yongle was particularly sensitive to the implications of sectarian activity for his own legitimacy.¹⁶ Indeed, many of his actions can be viewed in light of his obsession with establishing his legitimacy so his harsh response to the rebellion of Tang Saier must be considered in this light.

Nonetheless, there were clearly religious connections when it came to Tang Saier, and as Ann Waltner shows above, even legitimate religious practices by women could be perceived as subversive. It is said that Tang Saier liked reciting Buddhist scriptures from a young age and that she claimed to be able to both interpret the past and predict the future.¹⁷ Therefore she styled herself the Buddha Mother (*fo mu*) and was able to attract a large number of followers, or in the words of one later writer, to "delude the ignorant masses with her teachings."¹⁸ This places Tang Saier firmly within the tradition of millenarian rebels who use religion to undermine the authority of the central government. Such figures acted as founders of sects and guides for the people and were threatening because they existed outside the established orthodoxy. As indicated by Tang Saier herself, it was popularly believed that religious adepts could predict the future and thereby determine who rightly held legitimate political authority, or the Mandate of Heaven, making them suspect in the eyes of government authorities. This was especially true of the situation here as described above.¹⁹ It is also worth noting the fact of Tang's literacy, which may indicate an elevated social status, though the official records say nothing specific about her family background. Her husband is described merely as a subject (*min*).

But, as Victoria Cass points out, the Ming "was an age of faith, and the sign of the times was the ascendancy of the adept."²⁰ And temples and religious life offered certain benefits to women, allowing them to escape some of the patriarchal strictures of society as a whole. So perhaps Tang Saier simply sought a religious identity for herself from an early age. Temple activity thrived throughout the Ming period and teachers could always find followers and patrons, even amongst

members of the imperial family. The Emperor Yongle himself patronized one female Adept Jiao and built her a temple, the Temple of Arcane Truth.²¹ By doing so, the emperor hoped to both acquire legitimacy for his own reign and co-opt her potentially dangerous influence on the masses. Of course such government distrust of popular religion in China persists to this day with the recurrent backlashes against the Falun Gong and other movements, not to mention the Tibet issue.²²

Little is known of Tang Saier's life before she became an enemy of the state. She was married to one Lin San, who hailed from the same district as her, but Lin died prematurely so Tang was widowed at a young age. Virtually no other concrete information about Lin is offered in historical sources, though later fictionalized accounts provide diverging, and often quite colorful accounts of the background of Tang Saier and her relationship with her husband.²³ Despite her Buddhist inclinations, according to the historical record, like any good Confucian wife, she visited her husband's tomb regularly to mourn his passing. While on one of these visits she is said to have passed by a cave in a cliff. Looking inside, she allegedly discovered some stone drums, along with a stone box, which contained a book of magic and a magical sword, which conferred upon her all manner of magical powers, including the ability to command ghosts and spirits.²⁴ The sword also reportedly bestowed immortality upon Tang Saier and could not be wielded by anyone else. It was also said that Tang could create real men and horses out of paper cutouts fashioned with ordinary scissors, presumably learned from reading the book.²⁵

THE REBELLION GAINS STEAM

Impressed by her new-found skills, commoners from the neighboring districts naturally gravitated towards her as she transmitted her esoteric teachings and Tang Saier was able to use her skills to acquire food, clothing, and shelter.²⁶ While some sources maintain that she used her sorceress' powers to dupe the ignorant masses into rebelling against the government, others state that at first she actually had no big plans at all but was forced to rebel when she heard that she was going to be arrested by government forces suspicious of her fame and growing number of followers.²⁷ Again the Japanese scholar Yamane Yukio believes that the primary motivation for the Ming crackdown was because Shandong had served as a primary recruiting ground for rebel armies in the late Yuan so it is likely that the Ming feared a resurgence of heterodox sectarian activity. Such feelings were exacerbated by the proximity of Shandong to the newly constructed imperial city in Beijing.²⁸ As noted above, there

were also natural calamities in the region over the previous several years and widespread disaffection with how the government had been handling matters such as famine relief could well have driven followers to her banner.²⁹

In any case she and her followers ranged all over eastern Shandong and allegedly incited the people to rebellion as they occupied towns around the district of Yidu, southeast of her home district of Putai. Within a very short time the rebels had taken the towns of Juzhou, Anqiu, Zhucheng, Jimo, and Shouguang. The surviving records list a number of individuals as being her lieutenants including Dong Yanguo, Bin Hong, Liu Xin, and Ding Gugang, though virtually no information is provided about any of them. It is unclear why they followed Tang or what they thought of her as a female leader. Some references are made in later accounts to her sorcerous powers, implying that she used these and/or her sexually derived charisma to attract followers. But based on my research into the late Ming peasant rebellions where one finds female leaders (and warriors) often enough, it could simply be that these men had other reasons for opposing the Ming state and saw an opportunity to advance personal aims and agendas, so they tied themselves to her movement. It may also be the case that these men hailed from local notable families so the state authorities felt the need to record their involvement for possible later punishment. Or it might be as simple as the fact that including actual names lends veracity to the story and suggests a more organized and dangerous rebellion than it really was, thereby justifying the massive government response that ensued.

The rebels eventually occupied the fortified stockade of Xieshizhazhai with about 500 men and refused to come out, although they reportedly launched raiding missions into the outlying areas, burning government stores and records and capturing horses and other livestock.³⁰ The sources do not indicate what Tang's followers hoped to gain other than plunder, or why they chose to stay with her after the Ming dispatched troops to stamp her out. It may well be that they believed in her magic and assumed she could defeat the government forces with her paper cutouts. As noted above, it is quite possible that their motivation may well have been deprivation, as the region was not particularly economically viable and had been totally devastated repeatedly in the previous decades.³¹ In any case at this point the Ming government dispatched the Guard Commander of Qingzhou prefecture, Gao Feng, to deal with the rebel threat. When the government forces arrived at the stockade, the insurgents refused to come forth. In the middle of the night however, the rebels burst out and Gao Feng and his men were ambushed and slaughtered in a deadly pincer attack.³² Upon hearing the news, the central government ordered all local government organs to dispatch men

with all due haste to relieve the city.

Apparently pleased with their success, the rebels rebuffed the offer of one government envoy, who promised them clemency if they dispersed. This prompted the guard commander of Yizhou to memorialize the throne, saying, “The Juzhou bandit Dong Yanguo has amassed over 2000 people who raise red and white standards in his name as they go about looting and killing. The chiliarch of Juzhou, Sun Gong, tried to pacify them, but they refused and killed his messengers and now are becoming increasingly fierce and unrestrained.”³³ At this point the Yongle Emperor ordered the Marquis of Anyuan, Liu Sheng, to lead a government assault to crush the rebels. He was to be supported by Assistant Commander Liu Zhong.³⁴ Liu was one of the empire’s foremost military commanders, indicating the gravity of the situation in the eyes of the throne.

THE GOVERNMENT RESPONDS

The Ming army under Liu Sheng advanced and quickly surrounded the rebel stockade. Liu reported that the insurgents had really dug in and even though their numbers were small, it was going to be very difficult to extricate them, as they were like a cornered scorpion, ready to sting.³⁵ Liu warned that Gao Feng had not adequately prepared or encircled the enemy before so now it was up to Liu himself to proceed with all due caution to make sure the area around the stockade was secured. As Liu was making his preparations, the rebels sent forth an envoy in the form of a young child to plead for leniency. The envoy spoke to Regional Commander Wu Liang and promised to surrender the next day. The rebels claimed they were already running dangerously low on both food and water.³⁶ This prompted Liu Sheng to beef up defenses to the east of the city, where he knew there was an old waterway.³⁷ The rebel offer was but a ruse, however, and during the second watch of the night, they sallied forth and cut their way out of the encirclement, killing Liu Zhong in a hail of arrows.³⁸ It is said that Liu Sheng did not realize what had happened until dawn and although he sent his men out in hot pursuit of the enemy and they captured 134 men and women, Tang Saier, and several other rebel leaders were not among them.³⁹

Meanwhile, Tang Saier’s associate Bin Hong led a throng of her followers against the town of Anqiu, where District Magistrate Zhang Yu and his assistant, Ma Hui, assembled a group of 800 sturdy volunteers; men, women, and children alike, to resist the rebels to the death.⁴⁰ Reports circulating out of the area indicated that more than 2,000 rebels were still burning and looting with reckless abandon.

Nevertheless, in their initial assault upon Anqiu, the rebels were turned back by the hastily assembled volunteer militia. Frustrated by their inability to capture the city, the rebels recruited help from Juzhou and Jimo and reportedly assembled some 10,000 men for a renewed assault upon Anqiu, threatening to massacre all within the city. At this point the central government became very alarmed and it seemed certain that all the nearby towns and villages would soon fall into rebel hands.

It was at this juncture that Regional Commander Wei Qing, who had been stationed at the coast to guard against possible Japanese pirate attacks, came to the rescue. Hearing of the peril of Anqiu, Wei hastened forth with 1,000 cavalry, traveling day and night. Wei's forces hit the rebels from behind and scattered them in defeat. But because they had superior numbers, the rebels managed to regroup and prepared for another clash with the weary Ming units. Just as the second battle was about to commence, the drums sounded within the city and the people burst out, putting the rebels to the run. Although the rebel leader Bin Hong managed to escape, over 2,000 rebels were killed and more were captured, though the sources differ as to exactly how many.⁴¹

Wei Qing was rightly regarded as the savior of Anqiu and given a hero's welcome by the grateful populace. His superior, Liu Sheng, did not see things the same way. Arriving late, Liu was furious at Wei Qing for not waiting for his arrival before attacking the rebels. Liu accused Wei of acting outside the scope of his authority and demanded that Wei be put into fetters and tried for his alleged crimes.⁴² Wei refused to submit and actually pleaded for leniency for some of the rebel followers. That same day the Commander of Aoshan, Wang Zhen, led 150 men into battle and routed the rebels at Zhucheng, southeast of Anqiu. He then slaughtered the remaining rebels discovered at a variety of minor hideouts. With this Shandong was declared pacified and the rebellion was declared crushed even though Tang Saier was still at large.

FALLOUT AND AFTERMATH

While many of the commanders responsible for the Ming "victories" were subsequently promoted and rewarded, Liu Sheng found himself impeached by the Ministry of Justice.⁴³ Liu was first of all accused of laxity in acting against the rebels. He was said to have just laid back and waited for recognition rather than pushing forth with a solid plan. Furthermore, because he failed to erect defenses in the siege of the stockade, he needlessly sacrificed government troops in the ensuing night ambush. The censors argued that at least his subordinate Liu Zhong waded into the thick of the fray and died fighting. But where was Liu

Sheng? His selfish reluctance to fight allowed the rebels to take advantage of the situation and escape. Moreover, even when he finally did dispatch men to chase the escaped rebels, Liu Sheng still stayed behind. Yet when Wei Qing got news of the threat he galloped forth day and night and smashed the enemy without the least hesitation. When Liu himself finally showed up three days later he was clearly jealous of Wei Qing and therefore sought to discredit him. Liu was furthermore accused of vainglory and disrespecting and underestimating the potential strength of his enemies.⁴⁴ In pronouncing his judgment on the case Yongle said, “Every time I give the command to send forth a general with his army I enjoin them to heed my instructions so that the plan will be a complete success. But now [Liu] Sheng has disobeyed my commands in his greed for glory. This is a crime for which there can be no lenience!”⁴⁵ Despite this seemingly harsh proclamation, Liu Sheng was later pardoned only to have his military incompetence get him killed in an ambush in Vietnam.

After this the primary ringleaders of the rebellion, including Liu Jun, were all executed though most of their followers found their death sentences commuted, as was standard practice in the Ming. Many of them were in fact sentenced to perform guard duty in Vietnam, which was then the Ming province of Jiaozhi.⁴⁶ This eventually turned into a death sentence for some. Government officials who were lax in their duty and had neglected to report and act on the rebellion were deemed equally culpable and also sentenced to death.⁴⁷ The fact that the Ming condemned so many local officials to death for failing to report uprising in a timely fashion speaks volumes about Ming concerns over sedition, especially so close to the new capital.

But all these executions did not solve the government’s biggest problem. Tang Saier was still on the loose. Yongle suspected that she tried to melt back into the population so he ordered that all Buddhist nuns and female Daoists residing in the Beijing metropolitan area and in Shandong province had to be brought to the capital for interrogation.⁴⁸ This process would continue for several months after the suppression of the movement with over 10,000 women being taken in for questioning by government authorities. And even these actions did not stamp out sorcerous activity in Shandong as a few months later another group of magicians claimed to have mastered the art of flying and started to attract followers before their insurrection was nipped in the bud by the government.⁴⁹ Yongle’s apparent paranoia about Tang has been read as indicative of his still shaky sense of legitimacy.⁵⁰

Some sources maintain that Tang Saier was never found, but others provide an even more mysterious ending to the story. According to these

accounts, Tang Saier was finally captured by Ming authorities. But when the time came to execute her, the executioner's blade could not harm her naked body and she was put back in jail. Next the government agents tried to cane her but the wood could not touch her skin. When they tried to bind her feet with iron chains, the shackles simply fell away. This allowed her to make her escape and "no one knew whatever became of her."⁵¹ As a result of stories such as this a whole cycle of myths and legends grew up around Tang Saier's life and she remains a bit of a local notable to this day, allegedly still wandering the countryside, righting wrongs. In the Qing dynasty a two-volume novel of her life and deeds, greatly embellished, was written by Lu Xiong.⁵² The novel remains in print today. Likewise, Tang Saier remains the quintessential embodiment of the female warrior adept.

ASSESSING TANG SAIER

Her place in more orthodox historiography is understandably less positive and more problematic. Ming historians were at great pains to portray her as the worst kind of troublemaker as she was not only a rebel, but also a sorceress (*yaofu*), who used both magic and religion to delude the gullible masses. Significantly, however, Gu casts doubt upon her magical prowess, suggesting it was gullibility on the part of the ignorant masses that allowed the rebellion to spread. These crimes were exacerbated even more by the fact that she was a woman. Writing just after the fall of the Ming, Gu Yingtai states, "Since ancient times there have always been rebels but certainly the worst are those who employ sorcery." He continues, "while it is common for men to use such tricks, how much more suitable is it for women?"⁵³ He goes on to discuss other rebels throughout history and examines some of the reasons for the expansion of the movement, including official laxity and incompetence. But then Gu returns to Tang Saier herself, with whom he is clearly fascinated. First he admits that she certainly could wield a sword and definitely had skills that impressed the common folk. And there was also the matter of her disappearance. No trace of her was ever found despite extensive searching. How did she escape government hands? Was she really a sorceress? Was she a human? Gu admits, "I have no idea!"⁵⁴

Other Ming historians had similar assessments of Tang Saier. Tan Qian, author of the *Guoque* also compared Tang Saier to rebels and witches of the past and, quoting other writers, noted, "Sages take human life as paramount and love people but the wicked seek to do harm to the people and start rebellions. They therefore use sorcerous arts to delude the masses . . . Tang Saier is one of these. . . . But after her

escape the rounding up of nuns stirred up much anger and resentment amongst the people and caused even greater problems so that it became even more difficult to pacify them. . .”⁵⁵ Tan concludes that there was no easy solution to the problem but that people should seek to emulate and follow the ways of the sages and not be tricked by magic-wielding charlatans.

In examining Tang Saier within the broader context of imperial China the significance of her connections to heterodox religious beliefs cannot be underestimated. The Ming dynasty itself had been founded in part by religious rebels and the state authorities were very cognizant of the dangers organized religion could pose for a state that claimed to hold a monopoly on legitimacy. Any groups that could not be tamed or co-opted had to be destroyed and removed like infections. And, as demonstrated in Ann Waltner’s chapter herein, women with suspect religious ties or activities were particularly subversive in the eyes of the patriarchal state.

Moreover, as indicated above, these sentiments were only heightened at this particular point in time when the reigning monarch was plagued by his own insecurities about usurping the throne. Indeed, the Qing novel about Tang Saier portrays her as a righteous sympathizer of the deposed Jianwen Emperor (r. 1399–1402), even though the extant historical records contain no evidence whatsoever that Tang had any connections with such dissident groups, most of whom, in any case, were scholar-officials. Furthermore, her so-called followers seemed interested primarily in looting and plundering and not in effecting a new religious order as implied by the authorities. Once they actually rebelled they displayed few of the qualities associated with traditional millenarian sects and it seems most likely they were branded as such simply for political expediency by the Ming state.⁵⁶ Perhaps Yamane Yukio’s assertion that those who joined Tang did so out of economic necessity makes the most sense. There are ample examples of similar movements throughout Chinese history. Those living on the verge of starvation may well have wanted to believe in Tang’s magical powers or simply used them as an excuse or justification for their actions, feeling they had nothing to lose.

Of course it is also possible that what was most dangerous about Tang Saier to these traditional writers was the simple fact that she was a woman and was therefore privy to secrets and arts no man could ever hope to master. Yet at the same time she was the equal of her male peers in the martial arts and commanded perhaps as many as 10,000 men at the height of her insurrection. In commenting on her rebellion and her character, Gu Yingtai remarked, “Here is a case of the wife wearing the

pants!”⁵⁷ Perhaps this is a clue as to why the Ming government spent months and rounded up thousands of innocent women in an attempt to find Tang Saier. What if she transmitted her esoteric teachings to others, especially women? In fact it is possible that she did just this and spent the rest of her days instructing fellow Buddhist disciples in the mystic arts in some remote corner of the empire. Or perhaps she dwelt alone in the mountains of Shandong until she died of old age. She may have taken another husband and settled down to an ordinary life. Or maybe, just maybe, she really did discover the secret of immortality and still does wander the Chinese countryside performing feats of derring-do and righting wrongs. I, for one, have no idea.

NOTES

- 1 On the late Ming peasant rebels, see James B. Parsons, *The Peasant Rebellions of the Late Ming Dynasty* repr. (Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies, 1993).
- 2 For a detailed discussion of Ming dynasty historical novels and the archetypal heroes and villains portrayed in them, see Shelley Hsueh-lun Chang, *History and Legend* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990).
- 3 Again, there are far too many accounts of Li Zicheng to mention here as the production of histories of peasant rebels became something of a cottage industry in the People's Republic of China in the Communist-era 1950s and 1960s. In English, see Parsons, *Peasant Rebellions*; Arthur W. Hummel, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period* 2 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1943), 491–3; Kenneth M. Swope, “Li Zicheng,” in Kerry Brown, ed., *The Berkshire Dictionary of Chinese Biography* 4 vols., (Great Barrington, MA: Berkshire, 2014), 942–52; and Frederic Wakeman, “The Shun Interregnum of 1644,” in Jonathan D. Spence and John E. Wills Jr., eds., *From Ming to Ch'ing: Conquest, Region, and Continuity in Seventeenth Century China* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), 39–87. The official biography of Li Zicheng can be found in Zhang Tingyu et al., eds., *Ming shi* 12 vols. (Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1994), 7948–69, in the biographical chapter on the “wandering bandits,” which also mentions, in passing, the subject of the present study. Hereafter cited as MS. Also see Dai Li and Wu Qiao, *Liukou changbian* 2 vols. (Beijing: Shumu wenxian chubanshe, 1991).
- 4 Victoria B. Cass, *Dangerous Women: Warriors, Grannies and Geishas of the Ming* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 17.
- 5 This issue is explored at length in Pi-ching Hsu, “Tang Saier and Yongle: Contested Images of a Rebel Woman and a Monarch in Ming-Qing Narratives,” *Ming Studies* 56 (Fall 2007), 6–36.
- 6 This comment comes from the Ming writer Xie Zhaozhe, and is cited in Cass, *Dangerous Women*, 66.
- 7 Cass, *Dangerous Women*, 80.
- 8 See the discussion of women warriors in Chinese films in Leon Hunt, *Kung Fu Cult Masters: From Bruce Lee to Crouching Tiger* (London: Wallflower Press, 2003), 117–39.
- 9 See James Tong, *Disorder Under Heaven: Collective Violence in the Ming*

Dynasty (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 46.

- 10 On the Boxers, see Joseph W. Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987). On the late Ming White Lotus revolt of Xu Hongru in Shandong, see Kenneth M. Swope, *The Military Collapse of China's Ming Dynasty, 1618–1644* (London: Routledge, 2014), 76–7, and Gu Yingtai, *Ming shi jishi benmo*, Repr. in *Lidai jishi benmo* 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), 2417–18. Hereafter *MSJSBM*. For more on White Lotus activity in Shandong province in the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), see Susan Naquin, *Shantung Rebellion: The Wang Lun Uprising of 1774* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), especially 37–61.
- 11 Yamane Yukio, “Santo To Saiko kigi ni tsuite,” *Mindaishi kenkyu* 1 (1974), 1–16.
- 12 See Yamane, “Santo To Saiko kigi ni tsuite,” 11, and Hsu, “Tang Saier and Yongle,” 20–22.
- 13 Barend J. Ter Haar, *White Lotus Teachings in Chinese Religious History* (Leiden: Brill, 1997) 138–9, and 194–5; also discussed in Hsu, “Tang Saier and Yongle,” 22.
- 14 See the discussion in Wu Renshu, “Yaohu hu? Nuxian hu? Lun Tang Saier zai Ming-Qing shiqi de xingxiang zhuanbian,” in Lu Fangshang, ed. *Wusheng zhi sheng (I): Jindai Zhongguo de funu yu guojia* (Taipei: Jindai shisuo, 2003), 1–4. Also see Hsu, “Tang Saier and Yongle,” 23–4.
- 15 On the sectarian activity that surrounded the founding of the Ming, see F.W. Mote, “The Founding of the Ming Dynasty,” in *CHC* 7, 37–47. It should be noted here that I am merely employing terms such as White Lotus and Red Turbans for the sake of convenience. In actuality there were many sects with widely divergent beliefs, practices and goals but government authorities tended to lump them together under blanket categories such as those used here. For more on the White Lotus in particular, see ter Haar, *White Lotus Teachings*.
- 16 Hsu, “Tang Saier and Yongle,” 29–31.
- 17 See Yang Shiqi et al., comps., *Ming Shilu, Taizong shilu* [*Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty, Records of Emperor Taizong*] (ca. 1430) 144 vols.+ 21 vols. of appendices (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiu yuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1962–1966), 2193. Hereafter cited as *MSL*. All citations of the *Ming shilu* contained in this chapter refer to the Yongle (1403–24) reign.
- 18 See *MSJSBM*, 2217.
- 19 For a recent biography of Yongle, see Shih-shan Henry Tsai, *Perpetual Happiness: The Ming Emperor Yongle* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2001). Also see *DMB*, 355–64.
- 20 Cass, *Dangerous Women*, 67. On popular patronage of the Buddhist religion and the garnering of spiritual capital, see Timothy Brook, *Praying for Power: Buddhism and the Formation of Gentry Society in Late-Ming Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).
- 21 Cass, *Dangerous Women*, 68. Her source is Shen Defu’s fascinating *Wanli ye hu bian*, a collection of gossip anecdotes about Ming history and court life dating from the early seventeenth century.
- 22 For a fascinating look at late imperial Chinese governmental approaches to the perceived dangers of heterodox magic, see Philip A. Kuhn, *Soulstealers: The Chinese Sorcery Scare of 1768* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).
- 23 See the summary in Hsu, “Tang Saier and Yongle,” 14–19.
- 24 *MSJSBM*, 2217. Also see *MS*, 4655.

- 25 *MSL*, 2193, and *MS*, 4655. Also see Chen Jian and Shen Guoyuan, *Ming congxin lu* 10 vols. (Yangzhou: Jiangsu Guangling guji chubanshe, 1987), *juan* 15/1a. Hereafter cited as *CXL*.
- 26 *MSJSBM*, 2217.
- 27 See *CXL*, 15/1a, and *MSJSBM*, 2217.
- 28 Yamane, “Santo To Saiko kigi ni tsuite,” 4.
- 29 See Wu Renshu, “Yaohu hu? Nuxian hu?” 1–6, and Hsu, “Tang Saier and Yongle,” 24.
- 30 *CXL*, 15/1a, and Tan Qian, *Guoque* [*Outline History of the Empire*] (ca 1653) 10 vols. (Taipei: Dingwen shuju, 1978), 1167. Hereafter cited as *GQ*.
- 31 Yamane, “Santo to Saiko kigi nu tsuite,” 12. He cites later Ming and Qing gazetteers as evidence for his theory of economic deprivation.
- 32 *MSL*, 2193.
- 33 *MSJSBM*, 2217.
- 34 Liu Sheng would later be killed in the Ming attempt to subjugate Vietnam. See *DMB*, 755, and *MS*, 4237.
- 35 *MSL*, 2197.
- 36 *MSL*, 2199, and *GQ*, 1168.
- 37 *CXL*, 15/1a.
- 38 *MS*, 4236.
- 39 *CXL*, 15/1a, and *MSJSBM*, 2217.
- 40 Yamane Yukio has interpreted this episode as an example of intra-class warfare, opining that those who stayed loyal to the government did so because they were economically better off and therefore they had nothing to gain from rebelling. Furthermore they might have believed they could actually benefit in the long run after a significant amount of the local populace was killed, executed, or exiled, thereby freeing up more land, resources and rewards for those who remained loyal. See Yamane, “Santo to Saiko kigi nu tsuite,” 12.
- 41 Chen Jian claims some 6,000 rebels were killed and captured in this engagement, a figure which is echoed by the *Ming shilu*. See *CXL*, 15/1b, and *MSL*, 2200. Gu Yingtai agrees with the figure of 2,000 dead, but claims only forty were captured, although perhaps he is referring only to rebel leaders. See *MSJSBM*, 2217.
- 42 *MSL*, 2200.
- 43 *GQ*, 1168. Tang Saier’s disappearance was the foremost reason for Liu’s impeachment.
- 44 See *MSL*, 2201–2, and *MS*, 4236.
- 45 *MSL*, 2202–3, and *MSJSBM*, 2217.
- 46 *GQ*, 1169, and Yamane, “Santo to Saiko kigi nu tsuite,” 8.
- 47 *MSL*, 2201.
- 48 *MSL*, 2203. It should be noted that the capital had just been moved to Beijing, which had been Yongle’s princely seat of authority, and the Forbidden City was still under construction.
- 49 Yamane, “Santo to Saiko kigi nu tsuite,” 11.
- 50 Hsu, “Tang Saier and Yongle,” 29–30.
- 51 *MSJSBM*, 2217.
- 52 Lu Xiong, *Nuxian waishi* [*The Unofficial History of a Female Immortal*] 2 vols.

(Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1991). The novel and its contents are discussed in Hsu, “Tang Saier and Yongle,” 14–19.

- 53 *MSJSBM*, 2217. According to Hsu, Gu takes much of his commentary from Jiang Fen, another Ming historian. See Hsu, “Tang Saier and Yongle,” 25.
- 54 *MSJSBM*, 2217.
- 55 *GQ*, 1169. Hsu also discusses Tan’s appraisal. See Hsu, “Tang Saier and Yongle,” 27–8.
- 56 This was by no means an uncommon practice. On imperial perpetuation of the term “White Lotus Society,” see ter Haar, *White Lotus Teachings*. On the transmission of White Lotus sectarianism, see Susan Naquin, “The Transmission of White Lotus Sectarianism in Late Imperial China,” in David Johnson et al., eds., *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985), 255–91.
- 57 *MSJSBM*, 2217.

CHAPTER 16

WANG YANGMING IN CHUZHOU AND NANJING, 1513–1516

“I have only two words to say: ‘Be truthful!’”



George L. Israel

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Given the volume of scholarship on Wang Yangming (1472–1529), students of Chinese history are likely familiar with the basic outlines of his life and central tenets of his Neo-Confucian philosophy. They may know, for instance, that in 1506, for criticizing the Zhengde emperor’s eunuch favorite, Liu Jin, Wang Yangming was beaten, imprisoned, and then dispatched to a lowly post in distant Guizhou Province; and, furthermore, that while living there he experienced a kind of enlightenment, formulated his theories of the identity of mind and moral principle (*xin ji li*) and “the unity of knowledge and action (*zhi xing he yi*),” and then began to teach these tenets to students and colleagues in

nearby academies. In addition, they may be familiar with his principal doctrine late in life, “extending the innate knowledge of the good (*zhi liangzhi*),” which was put forward in 1520 after he had suppressed a rebellion led by a Ming prince. In sum, the Ming philosopher, statesman, and military commander is known for confronting extraordinary challenges throughout his life, becoming frustrated with emperors and the immorality among governing elites, and choosing to stand up to it all by reformulating the theoretical and practical basis for moral self-cultivation and fostering an intellectual movement.

Yet, the history behind Wang Yangming’s intellectual development and the emergence of his student following is perhaps less understood. Scholars publishing in East Asia, for example, recognize a middle period in Wang’s life when he taught other tenets, such as “making a decision [to pursue sagehood] (*li zhi*)” and “willing with integrity (*cheng yi*).”¹ This period has been defined as commencing when he returned to Beijing in 1510 to assume office and continuing until 1521, when he retired from a provincial assignment in Jiangxi. It is also the decade during which he accrued a substantial following of students, many of whom would go on to become important advocates of his thought.

The intellectual world of these students, almost all of whom were literati moving through the examination system or early on in their political careers, was shaped most fundamentally by a set of ideas and philosophical worldview that took shape during the Song Dynasty and then evolved into a kind of orthodoxy when the Yuan and Ming imperial courts prescribed it as the basis for education and examination.² This school of thought is known as the Cheng-Zhu Learning of Principle or the Learning of the Way. As both an orthodoxy and comprehensive philosophy, it held a substantial attraction for literati. However, the Learning of the Way or elements of it were also frequently questioned. In Wang Yangming’s time, for instance, literati who were intellectually dissatisfied with Cheng-Zhu philosophy might seek answers or alternatives in the rich philosophical worlds of Buddhism or Daoism.³ Alternatively, they could further their understanding of Confucian texts by seeking instruction from a Confucian master, becoming a “student of his gate.” That is what many of Wang’s students were doing during this “middle period.”

But even this decade was replete with developments. First, Wang Yangming served as an official and taught informally in Beijing from 1510 to 1512, then in Chuzhou and Nanjing from 1513 to 1516, and finally in Jiangxi Province from 1517 to 1520. The characteristics of his teaching and student following evolved throughout this time. Here, we consider developments in Chuzhou and Nanjing, the second area where

Wang Yangming taught a consequential group of followers. As the stories of Lu Cheng and the Lin brothers show, many young men found his ideas compelling and advocated for them after leaving Nanjing, making these years critical to the development of his following. However, as the case of Wang Dao demonstrates, others rejected them because Wang Yangming and his ideas had become controversial. Nevertheless, his disappointment over this only served to confirm the validity of his principal teaching while in Nanjing: “be truthful.”

FROM BEIJING TO NANJING

Late in 1509, Wang Yangming departed Guizhou to assume an assignment as a magistrate in Jiangxi, but he only served six months before being summoned to the capital for reassignment. This likely owed to the fallout from Liu Jin’s execution in 1510, which initiated a turnover in officialdom. But Wang only remained in Beijing for two years. He found that even with Liu out of the picture, little had changed. Disgusted by what he saw as the outrageous conduct of the emperor, eunuch interference, and sycophantic high officials, and disheartened by his impotence to serve with the Way in the succession of three mid-level central government offices he held, Wang wanted out of Beijing almost from the moment he arrived.⁴ But his wish was only granted on December 27, 1512, when he was promoted to vice minister of the Nanjing Court of the Imperial Stud. That assignment required him to relocate to Chuzhou, a town located to the northwest of the southern capital.

In the meantime, Wang taught a substantial number of colleagues and students who came and went, kept his company, and held philosophical discussions. Making the Way known by developing friendships and close ties to students offered some relief from his political predicament. Based on what can be gathered from the *Chronological Biography* and his letters alone, at least thirty scholars sought his instruction.⁵ About half were of roughly equal status, as scholar-officials who both held the highest degree and had established a record of service to the Ming court. The other half comprised younger men who had just entered or were about to enter the ranks of the national elite by accruing such credentials. About twenty of these men, for a time, took Wang’s thought seriously and went on to advocate for it to some degree, and they can therefore be considered as students of his gate (*men ren*).⁶

Wang arrived in Chuzhou on November 18, 1513, remaining there for six months. His principal biographer, Qian Dehong, summarizes how he spent his time:

The scenery in Chu is surpassingly beautiful. Master [Wang] was to oversee horse administration. The area is a backwater and his position entailed no real work. Each day he toured the area between Langya and Rangchuan with his students. At dusk, people sitting in a circle around Dragon Pond numbered one hundred, and the sound of singing shook the mountains and valleys. Students would request his advice on the spot, and sing, dance, and leap with joy.

As Qian saw it, so substantial was the crowd around Wang Yangming that the phenomenon of “large numbers of followers accompanying him began in Chu.”⁷ This judgment would seem to be verified by an inscription Wang left on a rock face in the Langya Mountains. After describing sights they saw during an excursion, Wang wrote that twenty-eight students “brought wine flasks along, so we headed down and drank by the spring. By nightfall we were drunk, and everyone was altogether gratified by the experience.”⁸ As for Nanjing, after Wang was appointed chief minister of the Court of State Ceremonial on May 15, 1514, he went there promptly and remained for twenty-nine months, until fall 1516. Here too, his duties were not demanding, and he could spend most of his time hanging out with friends and students, taking excursions, and composing poetry. In the *Chronological Biography*, Qian even lists twenty-four students who, as he characterized it, “came together at the gate of their master, and sought moral improvement [lit., fling away the stains], day and night without rest.”⁹

Table 16.1 Individuals who studied under Wang Yangming in Chuzhou or Nanjing.

Surname and given name	Vital dates	Jinshi awarded (or juren)	Provincial home and status.
Bai Yue	1498–1551	1532	Nanjing Metropolitan Area. Studied at his “master’s gate” in Nanjing. ¹¹
Cai Zongyan	N/A	1517	Zhejiang. Central Zhejiang Wang school. ¹²
Chen Jie	N/A	1508	Fujian. Studied at his “master’s gate” in Nanjing. (Cf. note 11)

He Ao	1497–1559	1517	Zhejiang. Studied at his “master’s gate” in Nanjing. (Cf. note 11)
Huang Zongming d. 1536		1514	Zhejiang. Central Zhejiang Wang school. Studied at his “master’s gate” in Nanjing. (Cf. note 11)
Ji Ben	1485–1563	1517	Zhejiang. Central Zhejiang Wang school.
Ji Yuanheng	1482–1521	1514	Huguang. Chu (Huguang) Wang school.
Jiang Xin	1483–	1532	Huguang. Chu (Huguang) Wang school. ¹³
Lin Da	N/A	1514	Fujian. Studied at his “master’s gate” in Nanjing. (Cf. note 11)
Lin Yuanlun	N/A	N/A	Zhejiang. (discussed below)
Lin Yuanxu	N/A	1510 <i>juren</i>	Zhejiang. (discussed below)
Liu Xiao	N/A	<i>juren</i>	Jiangxi. Jiangyou (Jiangxi) Wang School.
Liu Yizhong	N/A	N/A	Huguang. Chu (Huguang) Wang school. ¹⁴
Lu Cheng	N/A	1517	Zhejiang. Central Zhejiang Wang school.
Ma Mingheng	N/A	1517	Fujian. Min (Fujian) Wang School.
Meng Jin	N/A	1543	Nanjing Metropolitan Area (Chuzhou). Student in Chuzhou and later advocate of

Meng Yuan	N/A	N/A	Wang's thought. ¹⁵ Nanjing Metropolitan Area (Chuzhou). Student in Chuzhou.
Qi Xian	1492–1553	1526	Southern Metropolitcan Area (Chuzhou). Student in Chuzhou.
Tang Yuxian	N/A	1526	Huguang. Studied at his “master's gate” in Nanjing. (Cf. note 11)
Wang Jiaxiu	N/A	N/A	Huguang. (discussed below)
Xu Ai	1487–1517	1508	Zhejiang. Central Zhejiang Wang School.
Xu Xiangqing	1479–1557	1517	Zhejiang. Studied at his “master's gate” in Nanjing. (Cf. note 11)
Xue Kan	1486–1545	1517	Guangdong. Yue (Guangdong) Wang School.
Zhang Huan	1486–1561	1521	Nanjing Metropolitan Area. Studied at his “master's gate” in Nanjing. (Cf. note 11)
Zhu Cheng	1477–1543	1517	Zhejiang. Studied at his “master's gate” in Nanjing. (Cf. note 11)
Zhu Chi	1493–1546	1520	Zhejiang. Studied at his “master's gate” in Nanjing. (Cf. note 11)
Zhou Ji	1483–1565	1510 <i>juren</i>	Zhejiang. Enthusiastically sought Wang's

			instruction in Nanjing. ¹⁶
Zhu Jie	N/A	1514	Zhejiang. Central Zhejiang Wang School.
Zou Shouyi	1491–1562	1511	Jiangxi. Jiangyou (Jiangxi) Wang School.

By reviewing Wang’s *Collected Works* and other evidence, about fifty individuals can be identified as having studied under him when he was in Chuzhou and Nanjing. Most of these men were young or middle-aged scholars under age forty who obtained their *jinsshi* degrees after 1511. Hence, although the documentable numbers were not much greater than the Beijing years, this was a group that, on average, was slightly younger and at an earlier point in their scholar-official careers. It was also more consequential—about half of these students went on to advocate his ideas during the Zhengde and Jiajing reigns. Some of these more consequential students are listed in [Table 16.1](#), as well as students for whom there is solid evidence of pedagogical exchange during this time, although it should be noted that several had pledged discipleship before 1513. Unless otherwise indicated, basic information will be found in the *Academica Sinica Ming-Qing biographical database* or Huang Zongxi’s *The Records of Ming Schools* (*Ming ru xue an*).¹⁰ The following four case studies illustrate developments in Nanjing.

LU CHENG

When the first volume (*juan*) of Wang Yangming’s *A Record for Practice* (*Chuan xi lu*) was printed by his student Xue Kan in 1518, it included fourteen records from Xu Ai, seventy-four from Lu Cheng, as well as Xue’s, for a total of 128 entries. This volume subsequently became one of the most important documents for seeing what Wang was teaching while in Beijing from 1510 to 1512 (Xu’s records), Nanjing from 1514 to 1516 (Lu’s records) and, finally, southern Jiangxi in 1517 and 1518. Regarding Lu Cheng’s records alone, Huang Zongxi claimed that “When friends saw these, many consequently understood [Wang]. These many records all contain pertinent questioning; had it not been for Sir [Lu] no one would have been willing to ask the right questions in this way. What is more, in addition to asking the right questions, no one would have been capable of such sophistication, thoroughness, and exhaustiveness.”¹⁷

Lu Cheng (style name Qingbo) met Xu Ai and Wang Yangming in Nanjing in 1514 or 1515 when Xu was serving as deputy bureau director at the southern capital's Ministry of War and Wang was serving as chief minister of the Nanjing Court of State Ceremonial. Xu recollected what had transpired when Lu was preparing to go to the capital for the 1517 metropolitan examination. Before Lu had even arrived in Nanjing, a guest called upon Xu, informing him of Lu's disciplined preparation for the examination: he arose early and studied late into the night, becoming so consumed by it that he would forget to taste things when eating and to sleep when resting. Indeed, Lu went beyond merely studying Song Dynasty commentaries on the classics and practicing crafting essays to seeking the profound meaning of the ancient classics; he thoroughly researched them and unabashedly sought instruction from others of his own generation. All of this demonstrated his focus and humility.¹⁸

"A pity!" Xu nevertheless remarked: "why not put this same kind of effort into seeking the Way?" The answer was obvious to the guest: "This will benefit him. As for those who speak of the Way nowadays, there are none like Master Yangming, but people are now loudly scorning and criticizing him; hence, should someone show admiration [for Wang], others will fear and avoid him. How is that of any benefit?" Xu disagreed. He explained that the source of the Way is defined by emptiness, while the operation of the Way is oneness. To arrive at the source, a person must overcome their self-centered propensities. Practicing humility will sprout a starting point. In other words, by being humble, a person can empty themselves out. Likewise, achieving oneness requires concentrating the spirit. Focusing gradually leads to single-minded concentration on the Way. "This is the crux of the matter," Xu stated, "therefore, Qingbo will come."¹⁹

Indeed, a few days later, Lu Cheng came to Nanjing, "to knock on the gate of Master Yangming," ritually presenting a gift and declaring his studentship. As Xu had predicted, the virtues he evidenced in examination preparation had led him to the Way and, therefore, to Wang, who received him enthusiastically. Following, his teacher, "first calmed him with [his precept] of making a decision [to become a sage], then nurtured him with irrigating and watering [the sprouts] and, [once Lu] saw it, [Wang] conveyed in detail the practice of maintaining and cultivating, reflecting upon and observing." Xu recounted that "From the transformations of Heaven and earth to similarities and differences in the varying opinions of the crowd, while there was nothing that wasn't discussed, he was also 'perpetually changed by instruction without words'."²⁰

Apparently, the impact of his spoken teaching and silent influence was substantial: “were it not for the master (Wang), I would nearly have lost my life,” Lu told Xu. Wang’s instruction had completely changed Lu’s understanding of the path to sagehood: “The Way really is with me—why engage in pursuing externals? Learning does indeed come in solitude; why engage in encyclopedic study?”²¹ He now understood that the correct approach to learning brings a chain of consequences. When a person knows how to learn correctly, he will gain a full understanding of what higher moral principle (*tianli*) means. Once higher moral principle is grasped, he will have the capacity to fully actualize his human nature. With this ability, he will be able to assist others in doing the same. Then, he will be able to stand between heaven and earth and assist in nature’s creative process.

Having understood all this, Lu Cheng found that the *Doctrine of the Mean* made sense where it states: “Only the most perfectly genuine man in all the world can thread together all the great constant norms of the world, plant the great roots of the world, and understand the nurturing transformations of heaven and earth.”²² Hence, Lu concluded that “From here on out I will know that the learning of Master [Wang] uniquely draws from what is true and real in human nature and sentiments, and that nothing about it isn’t enormously effective in this way.”²³ That is why he found his disparaging critics to be so misguided.

Wang Yangming also composed a piece for Lu upon the occasion of his departure, recalling his student’s journey. The day before they visited their master, Lu and two other students had gotten together to discuss what Lu had learned. One observed that “Qingbo has made progress in his studies each day. When I first met Qingbo, his ego was puffed up like clouds in the sky, and his words poured forth like flowing rapids. Now, however, with each passing day he becomes more reserved, contented, balanced, and happy to do the right thing, altogether unlike what was the case before.”²⁴

His friends felt that this change in his personality was proof of progress. One highlighted how Lu’s enthusiasm for his teacher had grown:

When Qingbo first met Master [Wang], he would visit him once a month. Later, he would go see him every ten days; after that he would visit once every five or six days and then once every three or four days. Thereafter, he moved next to Master [Wang], subsequently asking him for permission to sweep his room below the storehouse, serving him day and night.²⁵

As a result, Lu’s friend explained, he obtained a close understanding of

Wang's Way, adding that "In the matter of virtue, nothing is more excellent than respecting the worthy; in the matter of learning, nothing brings quicker [results] than being close to one's master." His friend found that Lu's admirable conduct notably differed from that of those who sought men of high status so as to rise in power or who wandered the marketplaces so as to enrich themselves.

Apparently, Lu did not believe in himself in the way his friends did. Of his intensely personal struggle with his teacher's ideas, he informed them that, contrary to what they believed, he was in reality regressing every day. When he first heard these ideas he had mixed feelings, alternating from feeling skeptical and alarmed to being pleased by them. He explained that at points he didn't know what direction to take and felt dispirited about it all. The confusion and darkness would intensify, but then suddenly he would catch a glimpse and see some progress. Burdensome selfish preoccupations would cease and then pop back up. A mass of delusion would attack and become even more entrenched. It was like pulling a boat stuck on a sandbar as hard as possible while getting nowhere.²⁶

Wang also recounted how he praised their efforts while also counseling a measured approach. On the one hand, it was a good thing for Lu to be so critical of himself because that would motivate him to persevere in trying to become a better person. Likewise, his friends' encouraging words should have the same result. Nevertheless, Wang warned, excessive self-criticism could become counterproductive and lead to backsliding, as might excessive praise, in which case a person would feel ashamed at failing to live up to others' expectations.²⁷ Wang did not want his students to become dispirited and give up on the sagely project of self-betterment.

Lu's questions for Wang Yangming, as recorded in the *Record for Practice*, suggest a sharp, intellectually curious mind, well-versed in but unsure of the meaning of his master's teachings, both in terms of how they applied to his own self-development and how they fit with what he had learned in his studies over the years. Most pertained to Confucian discourse, especially as it had been shaped by Learning of the Way (*dao xue*) schools formed during the Song Dynasty. He did pose many questions of a historical nature, such as those concerning the conduct of or statements made by King Wen and King Wu of the early Zhou Dynasty, Confucius, and the Han Dynasty philosopher Wang Tong. For example, "Lu raised the issue: Confucius said that King Wu was not altogether good. I'm afraid that he was not completely satisfied with him."²⁸ He also asked numerous questions about the meaning of much-discussed language in the *Doctrine of the Mean* and the *Great Learning*.

For example, “When the mind has become quieted and stilled through contemplation is that ‘the mean before feelings arise’, or not?”²⁹

Furthermore, he posed several questions about Mencius including about the chapter [in *Mengzi*] stating, “Grasped then preserved; abandoned then lost.”³⁰ He cited terminology employed by the Song masters Cheng Yi, Zhu Xi, and Lu Jiuyuan concerning matters of the mind and learning: “Cheng asked about Lu Xiangshan’s doctrine that people should devote their efforts to relationships with others and what’s going on out there in the world.”³¹ A few questions more directly targeted Wang’s primary doctrines as of that point in time. As he noted, “[Lu] asked about getting serious about one’s purpose in life (*li zhi*).”³²

Some records offer glimpses into the personal significance of these dialogues for Lu:

While I was residing temporarily at the Court of State Ceremony, a letter unexpectedly arrived from home stating that my son was seriously ill. I was so sick at heart that I could hardly stand it. The Teacher said, “This is the time for you to exert effort. If you let it all go at this moment, what use is philosophical discussion when nothing much is happening? People should steel themselves at just such a time as this. A father’s love for his son is of course the noblest feeling. Nevertheless, higher moral principle by nature has a place where it is centered and harmonious. Exceeding that is self-centered. On such an occasion most people feel that according to higher moral principle they should be upset. So they never stop feeling sick at heart. They do not realize that their emotions are imbalanced because they are suffering.”³³

Wang also explained that the problem with most people is not that they lack emotion but rather that they are overly emotional. As he saw it, excessive emotion is not true to the nature of the mind, the essence of which flows naturally through sentiment. Hence, Wang stressed that the original state of higher moral principle has natural bounds that should not be overstepped. A person should discern the mind’s essence, for nothing can be added to or taken away from it.³⁴

Lu also informed Wang Yangming that although he felt fine when alone and sitting quietly in meditation, that was not the case when he had to deal with things. Thus, he raised a perplexing problem that many other students had encountered and one about which Wang often spoke while in Chuzhou and Nanjing: although cultivating a still mind in a quiet setting might be relatively easy, it is difficult to maintain that equanimity when agitated by the exigencies of an active life. Thus, only practicing meditation is insufficient. When active, one must also “exert effort to master oneself.” “One must be steeled in the actual affairs of life,” he explained and, tapping the authoritative Song master, Cheng

Hao, he added, “only then can one stand firm and only then is one able to remain still whether active or tranquil.”³⁵ In other words, a quieted and undisturbed mind can be maintained no matter what a person might be doing, but only as long as he engages in the correct method of self-cultivation. Moral self-mastery is the route to equanimity.

About a year after he had departed Nanjing, Wang wrote Lu in reply to a letter, chastising him for allowing ingrained thinking regarding the meaning of “wide-ranging studies” to hinder his progress.³⁶ When a person isn’t calculating the benefits of taking a particular course of action, but rather seeking to accord with higher moral principle, everything that happens is in fact the place for learning. Consequently, a person can talk all day about morality, philosophy, and literature, but if such talk is only in the service of advancing self-interest and accruing prestige and profit, nothing good will come of it. The goal must be to shift away from a life driven by self-centered desires to striving to become a moral person.

Nevertheless, although Lu showed his lack of self-confidence in 1515, and Wang chastised him in 1516, he would remain one of Wang’s most cherished students and support his teacher in various ways during the Jiajing emperor’s reign. In that same letter, his master had much praise: “The conscientious inquiries about learning in your letter, [which stem from] your fear of failure, are sufficient for me to recognize no letup in your determination to make progress in self-cultivation. I am also very pleased! Without you, upon whom could I rely to effectuate this Way, so that those who come are moved to join in?”³⁷

LIN YUANXU AND LIN YUANLUN

Lin Yuanxu (style name Dianqing) and his younger brother Yuanlun were two of Wang Yangming’s students when he was living in Nanjing. They were from Linhai, a county located on the east coast of Zhejiang Province.³⁸ Yuanxu obtained his provincial examination degree in 1510, and may have met Wang (who was then serving as an examiner) when taking the triennial examination. After spending perhaps a few months at the southern capital, they dropped by some time in 1515 to bid their master farewell and request any last-minute advice he might have. Wang sent them off with an essay concerning one of his principal tenets at this time, “be genuine (*li cheng*).”

In his parting words, Wang indicated that Yuanxu and Yuanlun had been studying the *Great Learning* and also that he had been educating them about this tenet. Surprisingly, when Yuanxu “requested the benefit

of his instruction,” Wang simply reiterated, “Be genuine.” But such a simplistic reply didn’t sit well: “Does learning amount only to this?” Yuanxu then listed several categories of objects in the natural and social worlds and stressed how inexhaustible these were. He pointed out that scholars in ancient times would tire themselves out thinking these things through day after day, even for years, but never arrive at the starting point for it all or get to the bottom of the mystery. “And yet,” he asked, “[you] say ‘be genuine’. Does being genuine fully explain all of this?”³⁹

Wang insisted that was the case: “Being genuine fully covers it.” The genuine, he explained, is true principle (*shi li*). It is one and undivided. Nothing can be added to it, for if something could then it would be false. The most genuine is also never-ending, and all phenomena in the universe, as described by Yuanxu, have the attributes they have as a consequence of the genuine.⁴⁰ In brief, the genuine is the real, one, and constant; it is, in fact, the ontological foundation of reality.

Li cheng might be translated in other ways, such as “stand upon integrity,” “establish sincerity,” or “be truthful.” All denote actualizing the virtue of honesty but indicate that doing so opens the individual to something that defines reality intrinsically. But Yuanxu didn’t quite understand the revelatory nature of Wang’s approach: “Is that all there is to learning? Heaven and earth are vast, and the stars adorn it, the sun and moon illuminate it, and the four seasons cycle through it. If we were to draw out similar categories of things to speak about, they would be inexhaustible.” Wang Yangming, however, didn’t reply to him on his conceptually dualistic terms, rather seeking to induce a conceptual shift, much like the Chan master does with a public case (*gong’an*): “The genuine is actual principle. In Heaven and earth, [the genuine] is what adorns it, brightens it, and cycles through it, and the boundless categories of analogous things that can be spoken of are also all the genuine.”⁴¹ That is the reason why scholars in ancient times could never arrive at the starting point and get to the bottom of the mystery. For Wang, standing upon integrity ultimately opens the individual to the real.

Yuanxu found Wang’s explanation enlightening. Standing and bowing, he exclaimed, “Today, I finally see just how it is that master’s teaching gets to the crux of the matter. Please permit me to follow this for the rest of my life. I wouldn’t dare question it ever again!” Wang concluded by encouraging the Lin brothers to get the message out to friends living in Zhejiang whom he believed may also be getting together to discuss such matters, and the brothers appeared to have done just that.⁴²

About a year later, in 1516, when Wang boarded a vessel moored on the Yangzi River in preparation for moving on to an assignment in southern China, he dispatched a letter to the Lins, further explaining methods of self-cultivation that aid a person in becoming genuine.⁴³ Their master praised them for convening meetings of seekers on a regular basis for the purpose of mutual encouragement, also proposing that they abide by a few basic rules:

When not discussing and debating knotty issues, don't turn to gossip, criticizing other people's merits and shortcomings and successes and failures or doing anything else that is of no benefit. Just put yourself in the right frame of mind and sit in silence, guarding against wickedness and keeping truthfulness in mind. This is the way to rectify the foundations and clarify the wellspring, and of utmost importance when you are trying to grow in knowledge. If you faithfully carry this out and foster it to maturity, then each person should, according to their own ability, make some progress. When meeting, only eat simple meals and vegetable soup; don't eat a lot of meat dishes and waste money on wine and food. These are also ways that burdening the mind and harming the will begins, and are not to be dismissed as trivial matters and consequently neglected.⁴⁴

Although they never obtained *jinsshi* degrees, during the Jiajing emperor's reign Yuanxu and Yuanlun received appointments as magistrates and established solid records as problem solvers. Both also remained committed to spreading the Way. After convicting a monk belonging to the Guangci Temple of murder, Yuanxu converted the temple to an academy. He would bring students together there to discuss principles and the Way. As for Yuanlun, he passed through a series of prefectural assignments, eventually ending up as prefect of Chuzhou, where Wang Yangming had once taught. Having been deeply influenced by him, Yuanlun chose to name the academy he built there after him. At the Yangming Academy, he spent time with Chu scholars interpreting his teachings.⁴⁵

WANG JIAXIU

Several of Wang Yangming's students were individuals whom he had taught before and who made the journey to Chuzhou or Nanjing specifically to see him and learn more about his ideas. Some travelled quite far, like Wang Jiaxiu (style name Shifu), who trekked all the way from distant Chenzhou Prefecture (roughly today's Yuanling County, Hunan) to study under him. In 1510, Wang had been reassigned from his punitive assignment in Guizhou to the magistracy of Luling, Jiangxi. On the way, he passed through Chenzhou, staying over at a temple located on Hu Xi Mountain, where he gathered together with students and taught doctrines he had been formulating. That is where Wang

Jiaxiu first met him. “After that,” according to the Yuanling Gazetteer, “he followed him everywhere.”⁴⁶

Like Wang Yangming at one time in his life, Jiaxiu was intensely interested in Daoist and Buddhist thought, believing that from a spiritual angle these traditions had more to offer than the kinds of conventional Confucian learning he saw dominating literati education and scholarship. One conversation he held with Wang is recorded in the *Record of Practice*. Here, Jiaxiu states his position on the three traditions. He proposes that the Buddhist guides people towards the Way with the promise of transcending life and death, and the Daoist guides people towards the Way with the promise of longevity. In both cases, they really do lead people in the right direction. In fact, investigation into where these paths finally go reveals that even if they are not orthodox from a Confucian perspective, the end point is similar to the Confucian sage’s higher realm. “The ultimate reach of Daoism and Buddhism is roughly similar to the Confucian’s,” stated Jiaxiu, “it is just that although they possess the higher realm, they leave the lower realm behind.”⁴⁷ Hence, he concluded, what they achieve doesn’t fully resemble the kind of perfection attained by the sage.

Nevertheless, Jiaxiu further reasoned, insofar as these traditions similarly possess the higher component, they should not be denigrated. On the contrary, because Confucians in later ages have only understood something of the lower component, they have broken up and distorted the sage’s Way. Instead, they have unavoidably gone down a wrong path, gravitating towards memorizing and reciting literary texts, engaging in literary composition, pursuing fame and profit, and engaging in textual exegesis, all of which are of no benefit to a person. In fact, these Confucians have not matched the attainments of practitioners of these other traditions. Seeking to purify the mind and curtail their desires, these practitioners are able to transcend the bondages of the conventional world. Thus, scholars cannot simply reject these traditions out of hand. Rather, they should meaningfully direct their aspirations towards the learning of the sages. Only then will these other traditions lose their appeal, and simply die out.

Wang generally agreed: “what you have stated is largely the case.”⁴⁸ Indeed, Jiaxiu’s position was very close to one Wang had taken in discussions he held with his close friend Zhan Ruoshui (1466–1560) in 1512, so much so that one suspects Jiaxiu already knew of this and was telling his teacher what he might be pleased to hear. Both Zhan and Wang had the overwhelming sense that scholars were overly oriented to exteriors and bereft of interior knowing. Hence, Wang forcefully pointed out to his friend how ironic it was that these scholars, while claiming the

orthodox traditions taught by Confucius and Mencius, poured self-righteous scorn on Buddhism and Daoism: “Are they capable of anything like Daoist tranquility, purity, and preserving nature, or the Buddhist’s inquiry into mind, nature, and destiny?”⁴⁹ In fact, because scholars in their day had become so distant from the original Confucian meaning of humaneness and righteousness, and nature and destiny, Wang considered them far worse off than those they disdained. Although the Daoist and Buddhist paths differed from that of the Confucian sage, they each directed the individual towards some level of spiritual realization. Ultimately, that was what defined the Way of the sages.⁵⁰

For this reason, prior to and during his time in Chuzhou, Wang Yangming did encourage students to sit in meditation, just as he often did, because this practice was conducive to drawing them away from their preoccupation with conceptual clarification and scholastic debates. Likewise, he was concerned with the crudeness and depravity of literati conduct, and therefore sought to guide his followers along a high-minded, enlightened path.⁵¹ But the results weren’t always what he sought. In Chuzhou, he noted that over time, “they gradually developed the defect of fondness for tranquility and disgust with activity and degenerated into lifelessness like dry wood.”⁵² Clearly, practitioners were enamored with the states that these practices generated, here described as “emptiness and the void”. That is why some students were deliberately “advocating abstruse and subtle theories.”⁵³ Unhappy with such glibly spiritual talk, Wang Yangming changed tactics. While in Nanjing, he rather directed his followers to hold in mind higher moral principle and rid desire (*cun tianli qu renyu*), engage in self-reflection and examination (*xing cha*), and exercise self-discipline (*ke ji*).⁵⁴

In Chuzhou, he also explained to Jiaxiu his personal reasons for having decisively embraced the Confucian Way:

Wang Jiaxiu and Xiao Hui liked to talk about Daoism and Buddhism. Our master once warned them, stating: “When I was young I sought in the philosophy of the sages without getting anything out of it. I also once earnestly applied myself to Daoism and Buddhism. Later, I lived among natives for three years, and for the first time saw the general outlines of the learning of the sages, and regretted having mistakenly applied my efforts for twenty years. As for the philosophies of Buddhism and Daoism, there is only the slightest difference between what is most excellent about them and the [Way of the] sages.”⁵⁵

Noting that these Ways were “not so easy to distinguish” because the distinctions were quite subtle, Wang insisted that the only way to understand this was through real commitment to the philosophy of the sages. Speculation alone would not cut it.

Wang Yangming's own commitment yielded insights he conveyed in a piece written for a volume Jiaxiu had composed. In this, his Confucian learning, and what is distinctive about it as he understood it and would have wanted his students to understand it, shines through. Citing Confucius and Cheng Hao, he reiterated the fundamental themes of selfless humanity and empathy that he found to be central to the Confucian tradition:

The man of humanity sees heaven, earth, and the ten thousand things as one body; there is nothing that is not one's self. Therefore, [Confucius] said, "[the man of humanity], wishing to establish himself establishes others, and desiring his own success leads others to success."⁵⁶

He then explained more concretely how the humane individual's sentiments and conduct differ from those lacking in virtue:

The reason why the ancients were capable of seeing another's goodness as if it was their own and, upon seeing what is not good in another, felt bad for them, as if they themselves had pushed that person into a ditch, is also their humaneness, and that's it. Nowadays, [when folks] see what is good in others they become jealous over being surpassed, and [when they] see what is not good they stare at them angrily and view them with disdain, never again calculating comparisons. Is this not a matter of sinking into extreme inhumanity without even being aware of it? ⁵⁷

Finally, he linked these virtues to his tradition, thereby distinguishing it from Daoism and Buddhism:

The learning of the gentleman is learning for oneself. Because it is learning for oneself, the self must be conquered. When the self is conquered then [you are] without self. A person without self is without "me." I have seen many instances where learners in our time hold to their egocentricity and self-interest, rather believing this to be learning for oneself; [or] lost in the boundlessness, they enter a self-defeating annihilation, and are of the opinion they are without self. Goodness! Without even being aware of it, they thought they were aspiring to the learning of the sages, and yet degenerated into the aberrant ideas of Buddhism and Daoism. This is also to be deplored! "'Is there a single word which will serve as a guide to conduct throughout one's life?' [The Master said], 'It is perhaps '*shu*' [sympathetic understanding]'"⁵⁸ "Nothing will bring one closer to benevolence than to force oneself to act out of sympathetic understanding."⁵⁹ This one word, "sympathetic understanding," is of critical importance to students. And for my dear friend, because it remains a most excellent prescription with which to confront the malady, being diligent about taking it regularly is the right thing to do!⁶⁰

The malady ascribed to Jiaxiu was surely his enthusiasm for the "higher reaches" he viewed as the most merit worthy dimension of Buddhism and Daoism. Wang Yangming thus prescribed a Confucian ideal rooted in what he considered to be the original condition of moral awareness: the oneness of all creation, a oneness only fully apprehended through the

selflessness of which all are capable but also, to an extent, in all acts of empathy. It is by acting out of empathy that the most fundamental knowledge of what it means to be human is realized.

When Wang Jiaxiu and Xiao Hui were preparing to depart Chuzhou and return home, Wang sent them off with a poem, emphasizing the simplicity of his Way:

Scholar Wang also practices nourishing longevity, and scholar Xiao really admires Chan.

From a thousand *li* afar, they came before the mountains of Chu to acknowledge me as their master.

My Way is not the Buddha's [Way], and my method of growing in knowledge is not the Daoist immortals' [Way].

Open and level, following it is simple and easy; neither unfathomable nor mysterious, you can use in whatever you do each day.

Upon hearing of this, they wavered between doubt and belief, but then their minds awakened.

Compare this to a mirror buried in dirt, though enveloped in darkness the light within is complete.

One has only to remove the darkening covering, and the bright mirror will reflect beauty and ugliness.

Conventional learning is like cutting colored silk, with things like decorating and adorning spreading in all directions.

Branches and leaves meander all about, but the living growth nevertheless remains without a source.

The way a gentleman grows in knowledge is by spreading seeds and cultivating the roots.

The sprouts gradually come up, and abundant growth comes from heaven.

The fall breeze led them [Wang and Xiao] to think of returning home, together beating the drums on a Xiang River boat.

Xiang [Huguang] has a wealth of outstanding scholars, many of whom frequently came to my gate.

Before we went down our diverging paths I composed these words, borrowing them to express my true feelings.

For Wang Jiaxiu, then, Wang Yangming had tried to define a "simple and easy" path neither too conventional nor too otherworldly. But whether his student returned home with this message, as his master wanted, is difficult to say, because Jiaxiu also accompanied Wang in

Nanjing. Although Huang Zongxi and Xu Ai record eight other scholars who came all the way from Huguang (Chenzhou and Changde) to study under Wang Yangming there, nothing is said about Jiaxiu.⁶¹ While some of these men would go on to teach his ideas back home, what became of Jiaxiu is unknown.

WANG DAO

In 1515, Wang Yangming sent a letter to his close friend, Huang Wan, confiding in him about how troubled he was by the turn that his relationship with Wang Dao (style name Chunfu) had taken. In fact, he wasn't quite sure what had gone wrong. It was only after Dao had left for a new position at the Ministry of Personnel in Beijing that Wang began to feel Dao was distancing himself. While both worked in Nanjing, Dao lived close by and they would see one another somewhat infrequently, about once a month. "There was cordiality," Wang explained to Huang, "all of which derived from sincere kindness and heartfelt affection."⁶² If Dao had an issue with him, Wang didn't realize it.

For some time, Dao had been one of his finest students and a close friend. When Wang was serving in Beijing in 1511, Dao came to the capital, took the highest examination, obtained his *jinshi*, and entered the Hanlin Academy. He was also attending Wang's philosophical discussions and seeking his advice on various matters. After Dao departed for a new post at the Nanjing Directorate of Education late that year, the two men occasionally corresponded, and once Wang Yangming arrived in Nanjing they saw each other again. So Dao's estrangement did bother him: "after that, I beat myself up over this, wondering how it could be possible, in my relations with others, to have such ill-feeling, even stumbling into the pit of such pedestrian disputes."⁶³

Indeed, intellectual disagreements and unpleasantness transpiring between students following different masters appear to have been the source of the discord. Wang also told Huang Wan about a mutual acquaintance who had come down from the capital and spoken in detail about how Dao and others were gossiping about Wang behind his back. Yet, refusing to think badly of his friend, he told Huang, "my personal suspicion was that dishonest and petty students, hoping to create a divide among our coterie, by meddling and sowing discord, had fabricated things." Hence, he chose to believe that "this didn't necessarily all come from the mouth of Chunfu."⁶⁴

Clearly, Wang had become controversial among some literati circles, and that may have made a young man of twenty-eight just beginning his political career leery about further association with him. Yet, although social pressure was likely critical, that is obscured by emerging philosophical differences between a teacher and a self-assured student. Indeed, already in 1513, when Wang was staying in Chuzhou and Dao in Nanjing, Dao sent Wang a letter inquiring about a number of different ideas in a tone that struck his teacher as highly opinionated and dogmatic.⁶⁵ So Wang told Dao it seemed pointless to reply, and that his first solution was to wait until he was in Nanjing, where they could address these matters in person. Nevertheless, knowing that the vicissitudes of life might prevent their ever meeting, and assuring himself that Dao's smug confidence might actually reflect insecurity, Wang told him he just couldn't drop the matter.⁶⁶

In his letter, Wang reiterated what Dao had affirmed ("it is true that learning is for illuminating the good and becoming a truthful person") as well as the many questions he raised: What is referred to as the good? Where is it originally to be found? Where is it now? What practice is required to illuminate it? How is one to begin? Is there an order one must follow in the process of becoming a truthful person? What is made truthful?⁶⁷ For Wang, these questions were a sign of progress. On the one hand, Dao had observed some form of contemplative practice, for Wang pointed out to him that he had at one time only understood "observing the mind" and had therefore succumbed to a kind of quietism. Indeed, just a few months later Wang reminded Dao that "merely sitting motionlessly, keeping watch over this muddled, ignorant, disorderly, agitated mind is just Chan quiet-sitting to become calmed, not what is referred to as 'one must always be doing something (*bi you shi yan*).'"⁶⁸ Wang suggested that because he had failed to practice self-transcendence, Dao hadn't united stillness with action. That is why he felt confused in dealing with matters. Fortunately, such poignant questioning provided an important corrective.

On the other hand, Wang found that Dao had, "without realizing it, also been misled by confused [ideas] and gone in pursuit of unrelated things."⁶⁹ Hence, he was making the same error as scholars who adhered to a conventional understanding of Zhu Xi's teachings and what it meant in terms of moral self-improvement. As he would shortly tell Dao, "this is not the kind of learning that builds a foundation and reaches the source. Each sentence is correct, each character fits, and yet in the end you won't be able to enter the Way of Yao and Shun."⁷⁰

Wang therefore launched into a lengthy discussion on the meaning of "illuminating the good and becoming a truthful person," answering each

of Dao's questions. Regarding the good and its origin, he explained,

The mind presides over the body, human nature is within mind, and the good originates from human nature. This is what Mengzi meant when he spoke of the goodness of human nature. Goodness is my nature. It has no particular form that can be denoted, nor location that can be determined. As such, how can it be an object, one that can be gotten from some place?⁷¹

Dao was clearly on the wrong track—a result, his teacher told him, of failing “to examine the actual learning of the school of the sages” and of being constrained by the exegetical interpretations of later times, according to which “each thing and object has its own good, and so to see the supreme good, one must begin with things and objects.”⁷² Wang Yangming knew that Dao was holding Zhu Xi's ideas in front of him and accusing him of mystical theories about the nature of mind. Whereas Dao saw morality in terms of rules and abstract principles—the particular constellation of which depended on circumstances that must be examined—Wang had been teaching about the origins of goodness in human nature, and how human nature is beyond form or any particular construct. For Wang, mind is identical with higher moral principle:

What is referred to as a [moral] principle (*li*) pertaining to an object, righteousness in our handling of this object, and the good in human nature are differently named depending on what is being denoted, but in reality all are my mind. There is no object, matter, principle, justice, or good external to the mind. The good means that in handling some matter, my mind is pure in principle and uncontaminated by human artificiality. It is not the case that it can be found out there somewhere in a fixed location in affairs and things. If a matter is handled justly I will know it is right in my mind and heart. What is right can't be obtained out there somewhere by seizing and taking it. To “investigate” means to investigate this and to “extend [knowledge]” means to extend this. Insisting that the highest good is to be found in each matter and thing is to divide the two. . . . Human nature is without this and that. Principle is without this and that. The good is without this and that.⁷³

Wang drove home the point that moral knowledge is made possible by a self-transcending mind, a mind free of falsity, that unifies the moral subject and the object of moral knowledge, making for the possibility of a seamless moral life, whereby the person is so intimately involved in it that they perceive no division between what is going on out there and what is going on inside oneself. As for the question of how one becomes a truthful person, Wang denied that there were special steps or necessary effort, and rather made the case that knowing the good and becoming truthful are not separate matters. By removing falsehood, a person comes to understand the good and, in so doing, becomes truthful. All the conceptual processes learned scholars consider so important—wide-ranging learning, careful inquiry, prudent reflection, and clear discrimination—were to be directed towards this end.

Dao's perplexity over Wang's formulas about mind and morality wasn't his alone; many other students had been at a loss to understand him, constantly expressing doubt. But, more important, students to other masters appear to have egged on Dao's skepticism. Indeed, correspondence by Wang's friend, Huang Wan, indicates why Dao had parted ways intellectually. In 1514, Huang wrote a letter to Shao Rui (*js.* 1508), who was then serving in the Nanjing Ministry of Rites, and another to a former acquaintance, Li Xun'an.⁷⁴ Huang was clearly concerned. He had been receiving word of heated debates taking place between Wang Yangming's students and students of Wei Xiao (1483–1545, style name Zicai). So he was hoping to gather more information from Shao and Li, especially about Wei's philosophy. Furthermore, he sought to defend Wang Yangming by explaining Wang's position and also by advancing his own ecumenical vision in the hopes that the two parties might realize that they shared the same goals. Lastly, he hoped that Shao and Li would intervene to reduce what he saw as needless friction between imperious students.

The information Huang Wan had gathered led him to conclude that “those who see Bo'an [Wang Yangming] as right believe [Wei] Zicai is mistaken, while those who see Zicai as right see Bo'an as wrong.”⁷⁵ For him, that was unacceptable because, as he told Shao, “Within our country there couldn't be more than a handful of men with aspirations [to sagehood] like our own. Yet, even with so few, they still fracture like this, unwilling to come together to earnestly discuss matters and seriously search for what's right, rather acting pompously and ridiculing one another, just like boorish society.”⁷⁶ Furthermore, as he informed both men, what little he had learned of Wei Xiao suggested that he was a learned man who conducted himself with integrity. For that reason, Huang believed that a mutual acquaintance could reason with him and defuse the situation.

Unsure as to Wei's precise views, Huang had learned enough to know that the debate was an iteration of the famous one that had transpired between the Song philosopher Zhu Xi and Lu Jiuyuan (Xiangshan) over the relative priority of “learned inquiry into the Way” versus “revering one's virtuous nature.” That is, this was a debate over the best method for becoming a moral person. As he understood it, while Zhu Xi emphasized conscientious and wide-ranging study, Lu Jiuyuan placed more importance on obtaining contemplative insight into human nature. Now, Wang Yangming was, in a pejorative sense, being categorized as belonging to the Lu camp, which also made him susceptible to being labeled a Chan Buddhist. “These days,” Huang opined, “scholars all claim that Lu [Jiuyuan's] learning focuses on revering the virtuous nature and doesn't touch upon learned inquiry into the Way, and

therefore suspect him of being a Chan Buddhist, so they just cast aside what he's actually said."⁷⁷

In speaking of this debate to his friends, Huang Wan was really addressing the current one in the only way he could absent more information about Wei Xiao's ideas. He stressed that Zhu and Lu held mutual respect for one another. He insisted that as opposed to exploding in acrimony over trivial matters like people were currently doing, Song masters studied one another's work and benefited from it. Finally, he highlighted the shared goal of sagehood and emphasized that the ideas of both Zhu and Lu were beneficial to achieving it. In fact, with both Shao and Li, he forcefully argued that this debate was not about choosing sides. Rather, it was about what it would take to change and mature as an individual, and to acquire insight and find self-fulfillment. He insisted that the measure of the worth of an idea was not the status of the person who put it forward but rather the extent to which it served these goals. By that standard, Huang stressed, there might be something of value in both Zhu Xi's and Lu Jiuyuan's ideas.

While Huang Wan was corresponding with these friends, he was also corresponding with Wang Dao, who had been spending time with Wei Xiao and was soliciting Huang's thoughts about where Wang Yangming stood on the matter of the Zhu-Lu controversy. Here again, Huang warned him that there was no place in the learning of the sages for smug sectarian rivalry, also speaking of his philosophy of mind, because his ideas as of this point in his life were so close to those of his friend Wang Yangming, and he likely sought to draw Dao back into their orbit. He told Dao that a person who wished to study what made a sage a sage must only seek within his mind. To do so, he must first overcome and rid the camouflaging caused by the false, self-centered self. Once he does that, the essence of mind becomes transparent and the foundation of all under Heaven is established. Huang insisted that Zhu and Lu both aimed to bring forward this realization but that each had differing attainments and biases; hence, neither was altogether complete. Nevertheless, Huang positioned himself more closely to Lu because he believed that scholars erred in emphasizing on becoming more knowledgeable, in a factual sense, instead of engaging in practices that rid selfishness and revealed this moral mind. Unfortunately, he felt that they were merely seeking with a dualistic mind, a method that only deepened the camouflaging.⁷⁸

Neither Wang Yangming's nor Huang Wan's letters, all of which come across as both defensive and combative in view of the dominance of the Zhu Xi's philosophy, persuaded Wang Dao to be open-minded about their views on the nature of mind and its foundational significance. In

fact, later in life, Dao wrote numerous essays that were highly critical of nearly every major doctrine that Wang had proposed.⁷⁹ He also respectfully corresponded with Wang Yangming and some of his students. Although the earliest extant correspondence dates to several years after the events in Nanjing, I think it still accurately captures where Dao was headed philosophically in 1514. In a letter to Wang Yangming's longtime close friend and student Zhu Jie, Dao was adamant in his opinion that Wang's theory of "extending knowledge" and seeking within the mind oversimplified intellectual inquiry:

[he] wishes to maintain that this completely covers the method for engaging in learning. As to the category of things of a similar nature to these—what is referred to in the *Book of Changes* as "[the gentleman] studies in order to gather knowledge, inquires in order to distinguish"; in the *Doctrine of the Mean* as "study [broadly], inquire [probingly], contemplate [carefully], distinguish [clearly]"; in the *Analects* as "[the gentleman] enlarges his learning through literature and restrains himself with ritual" and "[I am simply a man] who loves the past and who is diligent in investigating it" and "[I withdrew and] studied the ritual, [I withdrew and] studied the Odes"—he throws all of it out and states that the Way to engage in learning is solely to focus on the mind and that's it.⁸⁰

Clearly, Dao had veered away from and eventually rejected Wang Yangming's philosophy because he believed his one-time teacher had reduced complex matters to contemplative insight into the nature of mind.

The issues Wang Yangming faced with Wang Dao became the occasion for serious philosophical reflection. First, in his letter to Huang Wan about this matter, he bemoaned the bad times they were living through, taking as a sign of this how close friends with whom one enjoys much mutual love and respect will change their positions to please others and conform to social pressure. Yet he didn't wish to believe that such might transpire between friends in his circle: "I had told myself that even should the few individuals belonging to our coterie be dispersed over and residing in enemy countries or feuding families, it couldn't possibly come to this!" But Wang's choice—and what he counseled—under such circumstances was self-reflection. Even in the case of Wang Dao, he concluded that their affection for one another ran deep, transcending worldly matters, so while Dao was treating him badly, he didn't really mean it. In the end, Wang Yangming insisted that the most important lesson was the need for individuals to be sincere: "Under these circumstances the right thing to do is to look at and scold oneself, and that's it! Mengzi has said: 'If one loves others and they are not affectionate, one should examine one's own benevolence. If in one's actions one does not succeed, one should always seek for it in oneself.' Unless one experiences this personally, they can't understand the sincere

intention and lasting flavor of these words.”⁸¹

Second, he explained to Huang Wan that this whole affair only further solidified his belief in the correctness of one of his major tenets as of the Nanjing years:

Recently when discussing acquiring knowledge with my friends, I have only two words to say: be truthful! To kill someone the knife must be placed on the throat. When we engage in learning we apply our efforts to entering the subtle place in the marrow of our hearts, the natural honesty and radiance. Even should self-centered desires sprout, that is truly a case of a speck of snow touching a giant furnace: the great foundation of all under Heaven is established. As for trivial things, embellishment, and comparisons, and everything nowadays considered studying, inquiring, contemplating, and distinguishing—it’s all more than enough for people to develop the traits of arrogance and to willingly go along with lies. People believe they are getting wiser and brilliant without even realizing they’ve sunk to being vicious, out to harm others, and jealous. This is really a shame!⁸²

So as a personal matter, but also with regard to what he wanted his followers to know about his evolving pedagogy, this whole incident served to confirm to Wang the importance of being truthful. He even told Huang Wan that “this is pretty much the true transmission of the sages which, unfortunately, has sunken so low and been drowned out and buried for so long.” He felt that people no longer knew how to be honest with themselves and others and thus overcome the selfishness in their own hearts and reveal their natural goodness. That, he believed, was the virtue on which people must truly stand, and it is what he wanted his students to know, even as, during the Nanjing years, he faced animosity and found himself losing such important followers as Wang Dao.

CONCLUSION

In 1516, Wang Yangming received the commission of grand coordinator of southern Gan, for the purpose of quelling widespread banditry in southern China. This was his first truly significant appointment as measured by the level of responsibilities entailed. But even while leading campaigns for nearly two years, he remained actively engaged in philosophical discussions with yet another substantial following of students. Some of these students had first encountered him in Nanjing or elsewhere, while many were new. Importantly, the ideas he had been teaching and corresponding about while in Nanjing, such as “be truthful” and “make a decision”, among others, were first committed to print in the form of compilations of material from his discussions in prior years or commentaries on classical texts. In 1518, for example,

Xue Kan printed the first volume of *A Record for Practice*. Wang Yangming's most familiar and discussed precept—"the extension of the innate knowledge of the good"—evolved directly out of this precept from the middle period in his thought and pedagogy, but was only put forward in 1520, after he rapidly suppressed a rebellion by a Ming prince. The Nanjing years were indeed formative for both his philosophy and the following that would go on to become part of the Wang Yangming School of the mid-Ming Dynasty. While some students, like Wang Dao, did indeed become critics, others, like Lin Yuanlun, were directly involved in the dynamic efforts to renovate and build academies and promote open philosophical discussions (*jiangxue*) in sixteenth-century China.

NOTES

- 1 See, for example, Okada Takehiko, *Ō Yōmei taiden*, vol. 3 (Tokyo: Meitoku Shuppansha, 2005); and Yang Zhengxian, *Jue shi zhi dao: Wang Yangming liangzhi shuo de xingcheng* (Beijing: Beijing shifan daxue chubanshe, 2015), 55–87.
- 2 Cf. Willard Peterson, "Confucian Learning in Late Ming Thought," in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 8: *The Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644*, Part 2, ed. Denis Twitchett and Frederick W. Mote (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 709.
- 3 Cf. Timothy Brook, *Praying for Power: Buddhism and the Formation of Gentry Society in Late-Ming China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 54–83.
- 4 Yang, *Jue shi zhi dao*, 56.
- 5 Wang Yangming, *Wang Yangming quanji* (jianti ban) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2012), vol. 3, 33: 1012.
- 6 George L. Israel, "Wang Yangming in Beijing, 1510–1512: 'If I do not awaken others, who will do so,'" *Journal of Chinese History* vol. 1, no. 1 (January, 2017), 70–71.
- 7 Wang, *Wang Yangming quanji*, vol. 3, 33: 1013.
- 8 Shu Jingnan, *Wang Yangming yi wen ji kao bian nian* (zeng ding ben), vol. 1 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2015), 402.
- 9 Wang, *Wang Yangming quanji*, 33: 1013.
- 10 Cf. Huang Zongxi, *Ming ru xue an*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2013), and http://archive.ihp.sinica.edu.tw/ttsweb/html_name/search.php.
- 11 Wang, *Wang Yangming quanji*, vol. 3, 33: 1013. He is one among the group of twenty-four men listed by Qian Dehong in the *Chronological Biography* as having gathered together with others on a regular basis at the "gate of the master." Here, only those for whom some identifying information was available have been listed.
- 12 Huang, *Ming ru xue an*, vol. 1, 11: 223.
- 13 Cf. Qian Ming, ed., *Xu Ai, Qian Dehong, Dong Yun ji* (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2007), 76. Xu Ai names eight students who had travelled all the way from Chuzhou, including Jiang Xin.

- 14 Cf. Huang, *Ming ru xue an*, vol. 1, 28: 626. He is listed as Liu Guanshi.
- 15 For Meng Yuan and his brother Meng Jin, see Shu, *Wang Yangming yi wen*, vol. 1, 482–3.
- 16 Wang, *Wang Yangming quanji*, vol. 1, 7: 199–200.
- 17 Huang, *Ming ru xue an*, vol. 1, 40: 295.
- 18 Qian, ed., *Xu Ai, Qian Dehong, Dong Yun ji*, 76.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Ibid. “Instruction without words” is a Daoist allusion found in the *Dao de jing* and *Zhuangzi*.
- 21 Ibid., 76–7.
- 22 For translation, Robert Eno, *The Great Learning and the Doctrine of the Mean*, <http://www.indiana.edu/~p374/Daxue-Zhongyong.pdf>, 39.
- 23 Qian, ed., *Xu Ai, Qian Dehong, Dong Yun ji*, 77.
- 24 Wang, *Wang Yangming quanji*, vol. 1, 7: 199.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Deng Aimin, *Chuan xi lu zhu shu* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2012), 45.
- 29 Ibid., 31. Lu is citing the *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhong Yong*).
- 30 Ibid., 43. Lu is citing *Mengzi* 6A: 8. For this translation, see Bryan Van Norden, *Mengzi: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2008), 152.
- 31 Deng Aimin, *Chuan xi lu*, 36.
- 32 Ibid., 24.
- 33 Ibid., 40–41. Wang is citing the *Great Learning*.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Ibid., 28.
- 36 Wang, *Wang Yangming quanji*, vol. 1, 4: 143.
- 37 Ibid., 4: 142.
- 38 Shu, *Wang Yangming yi wen*, vol. 1, 482–3.
- 39 Wang, *Wang Yangming quanji*, vol. 1, 4: 198.
- 40 Ibid., 4: 198–9.
- 41 Ibid., 4: 198.
- 42 Ibid., 4: 199.
- 43 Shu, *Wang Yangming yi wen*, vol. 1, 481.
- 44 Ibid..
- 45 Shu, *Wang Yangming yi wen*, vol. 1, 482–3.
- 46 Xu Guangshu and Zhong Shou, eds., *Tongzhi Yuanling xian zhi* (Beijing: Ai ru sheng shuzi hui jishu yanjiu zhongxin, 2009), *juan* 30, “Wang Jiaxiu.”
- 47 Deng, *Chuan xi lu*, 44.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 Wang, *Wang Yangming quanji*, vol. 1, 7: 195.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Ibid., 8: 230.

- 52 Wang Yangming, *Instructions for Practical Living and other Neo-Confucian Writings*, trans. Wing-tsit Chan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), 217.
- 53 Wang, *Wang Yangming quanji*, vol. 3, 33: 1014.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 Ibid.
- 56 Wang, *Wang Yangming quanji*, vol. 1, 8: 229. Wang is citing *Analects*, 6: 30.
- 57 Ibid.
- 58 *Analects* 15: 24. For translation, see D.C. Lau, trans., *Confucius: The Analects*, (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2000), 135.
- 59 Mencius 7A: 4. For translation, see Van Norden, *Mengzi*, 72.
- 60 Wang, *Wang Yangming quanji*, vol. 1, 8: 229–30.
- 61 Cf. Qian, ed., Xu Ai, *Qian Dehong, Dong Yun ji*, 66; Huang, *Ming ru xue an*, vol. 1, 28: 626.
- 62 Wang, *Wang Yangming quanji*, vol. 1, 4: 131.
- 63 Ibid.
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 Ibid., 4: 134. For translation, see Ching, *Philosophical Letters*, 29–30.
- 66 Ibid., 4: 131.
- 67 Ibid., 4: 134
- 68 Ibid., 4: 135.
- 69 Ibid, 4: 134.
- 70 Ibid., 4: 135.
- 71 Ibid.
- 72 Ibid.
- 73 Ibid., 4: 134–5.
- 74 Zhang Hongmin, *Huang Wan shengping xueshu bian nian* (Hangzhou: Zhejiang daxue chubanshe, 2013), 72.
- 75 Huang Wan, *Huang Wan ji* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2014), 18: 334.
- 76 Ibid., 18: 333.
- 77 Ibid.
- 78 Ibid., 18: 335–7.
- 79 Wang Dao, *Shunqu xiansheng wenlu* (Tokyo: Ikutoku zaidan, 1932), vol. 3, *juan* 6, “Da Zhu Shouzhong shiyu.”
- 80 Ibid.
- 81 Wang, *Wang Yangming quan ji*, vol. 1, 4: 131.
- 82 Ibid., 4: 131–2.

CHAPTER 17

ZHANG DAI'S (1597–1680) MUSIC LIFE IN LATE MING CHINA



Joseph S. C. Lam

A SIGNIFICANT BUT UNDERSTUDIED MUSIC LIFE IN LATE MING CHINA

Zhang Dai (1597–1680?) was a prominent aesthete, essayist, historian, and musician of late Ming China. Contemporary historians and literary scholars have delved into his preserved oeuvre for cultural, historical, and literary facts and insights, glossing over music details as irrelevant.¹ Contemporary musicologists have read the author's essays for musically specific data on late Ming *qin* (seven-string zither) music and operas, glossing over what it might inform on broad issues of Chinese time and place.² Scholars study Zhang Dai with diverse questions which are, however, not unrelated.³ For example, questions on his musicality evoke cultural and historical issues of late Ming China. Were his music activities typical or atypical of his time and society? How did his being the scion of an elite Shaoxing family shape his music life? What, why, and how did he write/dream about music as a Ming loyalist?

To examine Zhang Dai's music life as he reported, and as a

manifestation of music culture and history in late Ming China, this essay examines the author's celebrated works, namely his *Tao'an mengyi* (Tao'an dream recollection), *Xihu mengyi* (Tracing West Lake in dreams), *Kuaiyuan daogu* (Telling historical anecdotes in Happiness Garden), *Langhuan wenji* (Essays from the land of Langhuan) and *Yehangchuan* (Night ferry).⁴ With data collected from these sources and organized chronologically and thematically, this essay posits that Zhang Dai's music essays and poems constitute a unique source on late Ming music biography and history. It tells, from an insider's position, an elite late Ming gentleman's creative and purposeful music life, and it calls for further examinations on music as a prism of late Ming culture and history.

CONTEXTUALIZING ZHANG DAI'S MUSICAL WRITINGS

Superficially, most of Zhang Dai's short but informative essays and poems read like literary and nostalgic records penned by an aged and destitute author, dreaming about happy and musical times of twenty or more years ago. Craftily written and selectively anthologized, the writings constitute no formal memoir or comprehensive biography: the author did not arrange his essays chronologically or thematically. Nominally, he only wanted to present to his readers what he had dreamt and wrote as confessions to Buddha, and/or as records of his being an obsessed person (*chiren*).⁵ This authorial pose of Zhang's is neither whimsical nor simplistic. As Lynn Struve has demonstrated,⁶ writing down memories/dreams constitutes an effective mean for traumatized late Ming writers to make sense, for themselves and their readers, the horrendous events they experienced; and engaging with religion by becoming a Buddhist monk or Daoist priest or fervent convert was a sure way for the writers to assuage their sense of pain and guilt. And Philip Kafalas suggests,⁷ memories/dreams housed in particularized sites render emerging selves and expressions meaningful and intelligible.

Whether Zhang Dai soothed his traumatized self by remembering his musical activities in fallen Ming China remains to be investigated. It is, however, clear that he wants his readers to know about his music obsessions, and grasp the broader context and significance of his observations. As Qi Biaoja reported,⁸ the essayist wrote meticulously and skillfully, and anthologized his texts intentionally and selectively. He did not want to reminisce or historicize late Ming music culture and history as Wang Qi (1565 *js.*) and his son Wang Siyi did in their encyclopedic *Sancai tuihui* (Collected illustrations of the three realms of

heaven, earth and humanity), or as Shen Defu (1578–1642) registered in his *Wanli yehuobian* (Casually collected notes about the Wanli years, 1573–1619).⁹ Zhang Dai wrote only what he thought was essential, and wanted to tell. Regarding his music life, he neither explained, in words, musical compositions, styles, and structures, nor preserved musical works with illustrations, lyrics, notated scores, and performance prescriptions.¹⁰ He compiled no anthology of song or aria lyrics as Feng Menglong (1574–1645) and Zhou Zhibiao (fl. 1610–20s) did.¹¹ He also bequeathed no *qin* collection of performance tablature and essays as Yin Ertao (1600?–1678?), an erstwhile fellow student of music, did.¹²

Zhang Dai writes his music essays for himself and for readers who were/are familiar with late Ming music practices. For these readers, Zhang Dai does not need to detail what he actually played, heard and saw. He only needs to highlight salient features that illustrate meanings and functions of the music that he experienced. This discursive strategy of the essayist becomes clear if his essays are read in the contexts of Ming music culture and history, and with reference to his theory of artistic mastery and rareness (*shoulian huansheng*), an ideal that will be discussed in the following pages.

Zhang Dai's music essays and poems factually corroborate with what is currently known about *qin* music and operas in Ming China.¹³ In the first fifty or so years of the dynasty, institutions of court and ritual music, *qin* music, songs, and operas, were revived as society recovered from the turbulent Yuan-Ming transition. For example, the Ming dynastic founder, Zhu Yuanzhang, promoted state sacrificial music and opera as a necessary means of governance and luxurious living.¹⁴ His talented princes, such as Zhu Quan (1378–1448) and Zhu Youdun (1379–1439) advanced *qin*, opera, and other genres of ritual and entertainment music in their princedoms.¹⁵ For example, Zhu Quan's *qin* music, as manifested in his *Shenqi mipu* (Treasured anthology of heavenly distinctive *qin* compositions) of 1425 not only continued the genre's performance and notation tradition from Song and Yuan times, but also provided the sources and models for publication of *qin* tablatures and essays in mid and late Ming China.¹⁶

In mid Ming China, Emperor Wuzong (1491–1521; reigned 1505–21) indulged in music and dance, setting an imperial example for the elite to indulge in musical entertainments.¹⁷ Allegedly, the emperor's processional music with drums, gongs, and wind instruments stimulated *chuida* (wind and percussion) music development in mid Ming China.¹⁸ What is currently known as *shifan luogu* (music for ten kinds of drum and wind instruments), a traditional genre of instrumental ensemble music in Jiangnan, is historically a descendant of late Ming *guchui*

Emperor Wuzong's successor, Emperor Shizong (1507–67; reigned 1521–67) launched a comprehensive reform of court music in the 1520s and 1530s, generating not only significant social-political developments but also a dynamic tradition of music performance, scholarship, and publication.²⁰ It was during Emperor Shizong's reign, when Ming China became relatively peaceful and prosperous, the four great operatic traditions (*shengqiang*) of distinctive repertoires and performance practices arose.²¹

By the beginning of the Wanli reign (1572–1620), the music and entertainment world of Ming China was commercialized, complex, diverse, and urbanized; its soundscape was filled with all kinds of secular and sacred genres of music played indoors and outdoors.²² What dominated this late Ming soundscape was *kunqu*, the preeminent genre of music/theatre of the time, the genre Zhang Dai referenced regularly in his music essays.²³ *Kunqu*, a classical genre of Chinese theatre, which is still being performed, is known for its exquisite acting-dancing (*shenduan*) and virtuoso vocal singing of literary lyrics. The genre is inseparably connected with repertoires of drums and gong music which were/are played as accompaniment, overtures, and sideshows of staged presentations.

As Zhang Dai selectively wrote about opera, songs, *qin* music and *guchui* ensemble music as coordinated music activities, he deliberately marginalized other genres, a choice that indexes his social position. Pursuing music as an elite with no appointed governmental positions or scholarly degrees, Zhang Dai avoided genres with explicit social-political significance, such as state sacrificial music (*yayue*) performed at the imperial court, at the founder's mausoleum in Nanjing (Xiaoling), and at the Confucius Temple in Qufu, ritual and didactic songs (*shiyue*) sung at national schools and regional rituals, such as the *Xiangyin jiuli* (Ritual of communal wine drinking and learning of laws and social-codes). As an educated and socially active man of his time, Zhang Dai could not be ignorant about those genres.

For reasons to be ascertained, Zhang Dai made no references to celebrated and scholarly music treatises of his time; being a scholarly informed bibliophile and historian as he was, he was certainly well-informed about theoretical works by prominent artists and scholars of his time. These works include, for example, Zhu Zaiyu's (1536–1611) *Yuelü quanshu* (A compendium of music history, theory, and compositions), which is a de facto encyclopedic summary of late Ming music theory and history, or Wei Liangfu's (fl. 1550s) *Qulü* (Principle of

singing), a classical manifesto of *kunqu* singing aesthetics and practices that was anthologized in Zhou Zhibiao's *Wuyu cuiya* (Collection of elegant songs from the Wu region) of 1616.²⁴

Likewise, Zhang Dai didn't discuss bawdy Ming folk and popular songs of his time, songs that circulated widely via prints and erotic performance at entertainment quarters.²⁵ The essayist was not uninformed about or uninterested in musical-erotic activities, and he could not have skipped discussions of the songs for moral reasons. In his essays about Yangzhou, a city that he visited, he vividly evoked the ways music, gender, and erotic practices intertwined as discussed below. Unless new evidence surfaces, what and how Zhang includes or omits in his music writings is deliberate. As such, it needs to be read as insider or selective communications.

Read in the contexts of late Ming culture and society, and with actual or implied references of chronology and topics, Zhang Dai's music essays not only reveal a lot about his musical life, but also suggest ways with which Ming music can be further probed and interpreted as cultural and social discourses of the time. For example, the essays sketch a clear trajectory of how the essayist learned music through osmosis in his early years, practiced it like a master in the early years of his adulthood, and retreated from music entertainment in his last years living as a destitute Ming loyalist. It is a trajectory that critically informs on the ways music individuals and cultural-historical-social forces defined late Ming music practices and developments.

ZHANG DAI LEARNS MUSIC THROUGH OSMOSIS

Zhang Dai's musical life can be divided into three distinct stages. The first stage spanned from 1597, the year the essayist was born, to 1615, the year after which he began to clearly date his personal music activities. During this stage, the essayist learned music through osmosis and in a favorable and supportive environment, a process with which most traditional musicians learned and developed their artistry. The second stage, which spanned the years between 1616 and 1645, is a period during which the author made music as a master: he performed proficiently, critiqued performances discriminately and theoretically, and produced music presentations or events expertly and effectively. This central stage of Zhang Dai's musical life began with his learning of *qin* music; it then unfolded as he extensively and regularly travelled within the Jiangnan region, developing and exercising his musical skills and

knowledge by himself and among friends. The third stage, which spanned from 1646 through 1680, is a time of retreat from active engagement with music as entertainment or as social activities. Except for some brief references to *qin* music, Zhang Dai hardly mentioned music in his late writings, a choice that not only suggests his living reclusively but also evokes some Ming loyalists' retreat to religious sites in early Qing China.

How Zhang Dai, or any late Ming person, learned to be musically proficient is a fundamental issue for understanding his musicality, and by extension, what and how music unfolded as a cultural and social discourse in late Ming China. Judging from what he wrote, he learned from his family members and close associates and through osmosis, a process that is commonly found among traditional musicians all over the world. Zhang Dai started his music life as a precocious boy who looked up to his grandfather, Zhang Rulin (?1558–1625; *jinshi* 1601), a learned, strong-willed, and witty gentleman,²⁶ who successfully continued a family tradition of serving the empire as scholar-officials, specializing in historical studies, and was happily married to a daughter of a prominent family in Shaoxing. He had the means to live a music life filled with all kinds of performing arts and entertainment

A great model and teacher for Zhang Dai, the grandfather directed his talented grandson to study the classics diligently and to think creatively, eschewing standardized annotations by Zhu Xi and other authorities in Ming officialdom and scholarship, and indexing dynamic and eclectic facets of Ming education.²⁷ The grandfather brought his grandson into his artistic and social world, encouraging the latter's interests and skills in the arts. In 1602, he took Zhang Dai to see Chen Meigong, a celebrated Hangzhou literatus.²⁸ There and then, the boy impressed Chen with an improvisation of literary couplets.

In 1607, when Zhang Dai was eleven years old, the grandfather was dispatched home from his official position, a career set-back that frustrated the able scholar-official, and prompted him to emulate his elite friends' music lives by starting his own household troupe of entertainers (*jiaban*, *jiaji*), and building elaborate boathouses for their staged performances.²⁹ This action of the grandfather created a critical environment for his grandson to grow up and become musical. Had the grandfather allowed his family members to attend his household entertainers' performances or their training sessions with hired professional teachers, his offspring would have learned, through osmosis, much about music, be it operatic singing or playing of drums, gongs, and other musical instruments.

The grandfather was a family man and a leading figure in his hometown of Shaoxing. In such a role, he created opportunities for his offspring to witness and learn music inside and outside their homes. For example, the grandfather actively participated in local and seasonal lantern festivals, when and where townsmen publicly celebrated *yuanxiao*, the fifteenth day of the first month in the lunar year. By night, the revelers would display colorful and brightly lit lanterns with story-telling panels. By the lanterns, they would drink, dance, sing, and play musical instruments and other games. The grandfather and his in-laws regularly threw lantern shows and parties for their families and fellow townsmen. The grandfather obviously allowed his children and grandchildren to participate in festive events outside the family compound. Zhang Dai remembered that as a child, he had watched lanterns and performances sitting on servants' shoulders.

The grandfather was an informed and witty operatic patron and audience member, a model of connoisseurship that his grandson fondly documented. As Zhang Dai noted, the grandfather once frolicked with a young colleague by asking an entertainer serving in their party to perform "Yichunling" (Song of Yichun).³⁰ Yichun was the name of a town where the colleague served as a magistrate. "Ling," the last word of the title means either a song or a local magistrate. Thus, when the grandfather requested "Yichunling," he made a musical command at the colleague's expense. To counter, the colleague asked the entertainer to sing a "Qingjiang yin" (A prelude from Qingjiang). At that time, the grandfather served as an official (*yin*) in Qingjiang, a town in Jiangxi Province. Viewed as musical and social activities, witty interactions between the grandfather and his colleague underscore the ways elite late Ming gentlemen musically operated as informed operatic fans at social occasions.³¹ It is a musical lesson that precocious Zhang Dai would hardly miss.

The same lesson can be found with another anecdote about his grandfather.³² Once at an operatic performance, the grandfather critiqued an actor's performance of Xiang Yu (232–202 BCE), a tragic military hero in Chinese history and theatrical imagination, as lacking in resonant singing. The actor responded by declaring that his Xiang Yu had a subdued voice, a witty remark that not only justified his performance and referenced the hero's demise, but also how he and his patron interacted musically and socially.

Witnessing such music making, some Zhang family members grew up musically skilled and informed. Two of the grandfather's sons, one daughter-in-law, and two grandsons actively engaged with operatic performances by household entertainers, Zhang Zai reported. Zhang

Yuefang (1575?-1633), the grandfather's first born and Zhang Dai's father, appreciated music and used it as a diversion. From 1616 on, the father began to indulge in operatic performances and household entertainers, using their music and company to assuage his personal frustrations.³³ By that year, he had repeatedly failed national examinations, and saw his ambitions for a career as a scholar-official fizzle out. To indulge himself musically, the father had pleasure boathouses built, and theatrical shows and concerts of drum and wind music performed there by household entertainers. He even personally supervised the training of some young performers. This indulgent and personal music making of the father was generously and sympathetically supported by his wife, who managed the family coffer. To sooth herself, however, she chanted Buddhist sutras, the ritual sounds of which Zhang Dai heard as a newborn and remembered until his last years. Like other elite women of her time, she had her own feminine space and soundscape.

The grandfather's seventh son, Zhang Dai's seventh uncle (*shu*), Zhang Huafang (1585-1615), was a talented performer and effective producer. He not only played the *qin*, but could also perform on theatrical stages whenever he wanted and by putting make-up on his face. His staging of Mulian operas was spectacular, a fact that Zhang Dai vividly remembered and described.³⁴ Invited by the seventh uncle, thirty-plus acrobatic performers would enact characters like ghostly guards with cow and/or horse heads (*niutou mamian*), perform somersaults, jump through hoops, and do all other kinds of stunts that impressed thousands of audiences. The seventh uncle's son, Zhang Dai's clan brother (*dangdi*), Zhang E, sobriquet Yanke, was also a versatile musician.³⁵ He could pluck the lute, blow the mouth-organ (*sheng*) and horizontal or vertical flutes (*xiao* and *di*), beat the drums, strike the clappers, sing songs, and act on stage. He excelled in all kinds of performing arts and games, Zhang Dai reported.

In addition to informal learning of operatic and instrumental music at home, Zhang family members also learned music in their social and ritual outings. *Guchui* and singing of popular songs and operatic arias were communally and extensively performed during local and seasonal celebrations in Shaoxing and other Jiangnan urban centers. Contextualized observation and/or direct participation is a natural and effective process for learning music, a fact that many ethnographers of world music have repeatedly described. And early exposure to music performance is key to children's learning of music through informal or formal training, a fact that virtuoso children performers all over the world, past and present, demonstrate. That Zhang Dai and other Zhang family members formally and informally learned music as children and

as active participants is clear. As a child and as an adult, Zhang Dai observed and participated in many musical celebrations of lantern festivals (*yuanxian*) in Shaoxing and cities that he visited.

A case in point is the carnival that the Zhang family helped organize in 1601 in Shaoxing.³⁶ By the night of that festive day, their hometown was a land of lanterns, songs, dances and parties. A multitude of lanterns were hung on tree branches, or set on wooden scaffolds painted red, or placed along roads in the town or paths leading up to the top of Fenglai Hill. By these lanterns, people would set up mats on which they would party, singing, dancing, and playing drums, gongs, and wind instruments. Being elite and affluent, the Zhang family, however, would build a platform under a grand pine tree for their own partying. There they would hold their banquets and had entertainers sing songs and play musical instruments. What Zhang Dai saw and heard in 1601, when he was only four years old, however, made a deep impression on him, so much so that that he could write about it decades later and in vivid detail.

The essayist probably could hum some of the tunes Shaoxing revelers sang; he would have picked up singing skills as a child or a teenager. To play with his elders, cousins, and friends who were all musical and could perform in one way or another, he would want to, or have to, sing like them. When people have plentiful resources, nurturing teachers, inspiring peers, they are motivated to learn musical arts; with deliberation and support, they can readily achieve excellence—see the discussion below.

Historically speaking, these elite and talented musical gentlemen are music agents who advanced late Ming music and its performance practices.³⁷ As privileged and resourceful musicians, elite late Ming gentlemen had financial resources and plenty of time to pursue musical arts and skills as they desired. They could even create opportunities and sites for themselves and their household entertainers to learn from esteemed master performers and pedagogues. It is no accident that some elite late Ming gentlemen were superlative musicians themselves.

One elite and master performer whom Zhang Dai admired is Peng Tianxi.³⁸ Noted for his performance of clowns and painted-face (*jing*) characters, Peng Tianxi would invite master performers to his house to teach him shows or fine-tune ones that he already knew. He would spend large sums of money on tuition fees and/or performance expenses to achieve his artistic goals for even one operatic scene. As an invited guest, or a featured artist, Peng Tianxi would perform at elite friends' homes, showing off his virtuosity, and affording them a chance to learn

from one another.

In addition to their own performing, Peng Tianxi, Zhang Dai, and others like them would personally train young novices in their household troupes. In the process of formal or informal teaching and learning, the elite and young musicians became more and more skilled and learned. That the trainees would reach very high levels of operatic performance artistry is attested to by Zhang Dai's poem on Qi Wenzai's favorite young and gifted entertainer.³⁹ Having mastered an unusually large repertory, the young entertainer could perform different shows day after day. He would please his master by accurately and expressively enouncing every word in the lyrics he sang, and by weaving melodic and rhythmic nuances so subtle that only attentive and informed audiences would catch them. Zhang Dai ranked Qi Wenzai's boy-performer as the best he had ever known. He even confessed that the best performer he had personally trained had only comparable performance skills but no similarly enchanting expressions. Zhang Dai's praise for the boy-performer is historically significant. It underscores late Ming valorization of musically accurate enunciation of words in sung arias and nuanced singing; both are still admired by contemporary *kunqu* practitioners.

The reasons why late Ming owners-connoisseurs-master performers-teachers of operatic music would hire the best teachers to train household entertainers, or personally and obsessively supervise the latter's training, index their complex and intimate relationships. Non-musical motives, such as desires for companionship and even sex, are clearly involved. This is a fact that Zhang Dai's comments on Zhu Yunlai's training of female household entertainers register, and a fact that calls for studies on desire, gender and music in late Ming China.⁴⁰ Before he would teach his actresses singing and acting, Zhang Dai reported, Zhu would make them learn to play different kinds of string, wind and percussion musical instruments. As a result, operatic performances by Zhu's actresses featured much more than staging stories. When they played musical instruments on stage, Zhang Dai reported, their string and wind melodies would intertwine, making rich sound textures. When they sang, their pure vocal melodies, punctuated by rhythmic beats of the clappers, would caress audiences' senses and bodies. When the actresses chanted or spoke to conclude their singing performances, their words sounded almost superfluous, Zhang Dai reported tongue-in-cheek. He had the same praise for the actresses' dances. When they danced on brilliant lit and richly decorated stages, they would make long sleeves and belts of their costumes circle their charming bodies like rings, astonishing their audiences.

Zhu Yunlai liked to show off his actresses, and he checked how they impressed their audiences. After he had heard audiences praise his actresses, he would go backstage to relay the good words to them. Zhu fussed about his actresses; he even personally patrolled their quarters every night. And he demanded sexual services from some of them. They, however, resented his patrolling and demands. Some would refuse to serve him by hiding. Whenever Zhu Yunlai failed to catch his object of desire, he would go back to his quarters cursing angrily.

Zhu Yunlai's artistic and sexual control of his household entertainers appeared to be excessive and perhaps atypical—he was a lecherous old man, Zhang Dai quipped. Zhu Yunlai's obsession with music and female entertainers was, however, not an isolated case in late Ming China. Another acquaintance of Zhang Dai who also staged fanciful performances by actresses was Liu Huijie.⁴¹ His performance of “Tang Minghuang you yuedian” (“Emperor Xuanzong visits the moon palace”), the essayist reported, creatively manipulated light effects to stage the emperor's romantic reunion with his lover, Yang Guifui, in a supernatural moon palace. Equally fascinating were the lantern dances Liu choreographed; he had his female performers appearing and disappearing on stage like magic, Zhang Dai noted. After witnessing such fanciful shows by Liu's actresses, Peng Tianxi once lamented to the essayist that Liu Huijie's female entertainers made male actors superfluous, and rendered his own performance of clowns and painted-faces dispensable.

Peng Tianxi's lament is hyperbole, but it underscores the significance of elite owner-connoisseur-performer-teachers' obsessive pursuit of artistic excellence and their sustained control of, or collaboration with, their household entertainers. The pursuit and the control probably helped Ming performance artistry develop, a fact that the case of Qi Zhixiang and his boy servant-singer Ahbao (Little Treasure) suggests.⁴² Historically known as a painter, Qi Zhixiang was in reality a multi-talented late Ming gentleman. He painted, wrote, played drums, gongs and flutes, and performed opera arias. He composed arias (*duqu*) and accompanied his singers with his flute playing and rhythmic striking of wood clappers (*ban*). He excelled (*jing*) in all practical and theoretical matters of music (*yinlü*). He excelled because he would obsessively polish every tone/word in his music, fine-tuning it hundreds of times, like one would finely grind steel nails with his teeth and in his mouth. As a meticulous and demanding coach, Qi Zhixiang would demonstrate to his household entertainers what he wanted sung, and demand them to sing to him what they had learned. The disciple he fussed over was Ahbao, a talented and handsome boy-servant-entertainer-companion, who would learn and perform everything Qi Zhixiang taught and

wanted. In the process, they became musically and socially close. In 1646, they would flee from the dangers of war, leaving Qi's wife behind at home, like a pair of discarded shoes. And on the road when they had been robbed and became penniless, Ahbao would sing to beg food to feed his master.

Genuine friendship and extended musical collaboration between owners and household entertainers was not uncommon in late Ming China. Zhang Dai himself was friendly with a number of household entertainers. He wrote a touching obituary for Xia Rukai, a household entertainer in the Zhang family, when the latter died.⁴³ And some of Zhang Dai's household entertainers continued to admire the essayist even after they had left his mansion and joined commercial troupes—see discussion below.

Growing up in a musical home, surrounded by talented family members, close friends, and household-entertainers, and learning all kinds of music skills and ideas through osmosis or active studies, Zhang Dai grew up to be musical. By 1616, when he turned nineteen, he had already developed into a consummate aesthete. As he confessed in his autobiographical epitaph, when young, he was

a silk-stocking dandy incurably addicted to luxurious living. He was fond of fine houses, pretty maids, handsome boys, gorgeous clothes, choice food, spirited horses, bright lanterns, fireworks, theatre, music, fine antiques, flowers, and birds. In addition, he indulged himself in tea and fruit, and was infatuated with books and poetry.⁴⁴

In his tongue-in-cheek and premature epitaph, however, Zhang Dai did not mention how he learned to appreciate what was natural, genuine, and rare. As a young man, he studied in a family house built by Penggong Lake;⁴⁵ there he would take boats out during moonlit nights. Floating on the lake, and listening to his boy servant singing folksongs at the bow, he would sleep in the stern of the boat, falling in and out of dreams. Only when the boatman woke him up by the end of his outing, would he go home, and then sleep with his heart-mind cleared of all his worries.

ZHANG DAI MAKES MUSIC LIKE A MASTER

From 1616 on, Zhang Dai began to actively make music on his own, and promptly became a music master. In that year, he formally learned *qin* music performance from a local master, Wang Lü'e.⁴⁶ The essayist learned as an advanced student; one composition that he learned was "Yujiao wenda" ("A woodcutter and a fisherman dialogue with one

another”), a favorite *qin* composition that is technically too demanding for beginner players. Two years later, in 1618, Zhang Dai took lessons from Wang Benwu, a master from Songjiang. In six months, the essayist learned more than twenty compositions, which included grand compositions like “Hujia shibaipai” (“Cai Wenji’s ethnic shawn music, in eighteen stanzas”) and “Meihua nong” (Variations on the plum blossom tune”) and short pieces like “Yanluo pingsha” (Geese landing on sandspit) and “Pu’anzou” (Buddhist chant).

Zhang Dai learned well and was very productive, and was proud of his performance mastery. He reported that he, the teacher, and two fellow students once played a quartet of *qin* music as if they had the same pair of hands and fingers, a virtuoso performance that impressed their audience. Zhang Dai’s mastery of *qin* music is a result of talent and dedication. Aspiring to be a guardian of *qin* music in Shaoxing, he once drafted a call to organize a music club in the city so that fellow players would practice together, learn from one another, and advance the reputation of their local *qin* tradition.⁴⁷

Zhang Dai was also a critical performer, one who had developed distinctive preferences. He confessed that he found Wang Benwu’s playing slick, and thus chose to remedy what he learned from the latter with a touch of performance restraint. He also commented on the shortcomings of two fellow students’ playing, both of whom subsequently became established *qin* performers. He Zixiang’s playing showed immaturity, while that of Yin Ertao was affected.

To play *qin* music expressively and to critique it like connoisseurs, Zhang Dai and his fellow performers had to know *qin* music history and theory, a specialized field of traditional Chinese scholarship. The essayist probably acquired his *qin* knowledge by learning from teachers and fellow scholars and by studying Confucian classics as well as formal and informal histories about pre-Ming China. Such an integrative learning process is suggested by the ways the essayist reported musical and non-musical facts in his *Yehangchuan*. Music chapters in that encyclopedia describe *qin* performers, compositions, and events alongside discussions on historical and theoretical concepts, such as the twelve standard pitches (*shier lülü*), the five tones (*wusheng*), and watching the ether to confirm tuning (*houqi*).⁴⁸

In addition to his formal and informal studies on music and its theories, Zhang Dai observed and learned from all musical events that he encountered in his hometown of Shaoxing and in Jiangnan that he visited. For example, in the summer of 1622, the essayist visited Suzhou where townsmen partied at the Fengmen Lotus Lake in the east of the

city. There, he noticed how Suzhou people put on their best clothes, and reveled on boats large and small, singing songs and playing *guchui* music.⁴⁹

In spring 1631, Zhang Dai visited Yanzhou, and witnessed a military exercise involving 3,000 horsemen and 7,000 soldiers.⁵⁰ There he not only noticed the military formations and valor displayed, but also grasped the nature of the acrobatic stunts and musical works performed. Some of the performers could spin their supple bodies on the back of galloping horses, sang songs in the northern style, and played ethnic instruments like the *rebeb* and other plucked lutes while riding on horses. Such virtuosity indexed northern and ethnic traditions; it was enacted because, Zhang Dai argued, the performers were household entertainers of the commander who was a northerner. Tangentially, Zhang's report references a much discussed malaise in late Ming armies: resources earmarked for supporting soldiers were spent on non-military activities.⁵¹

In the same year, Zhang Dai and his friends celebrated mid-autumn festival in their hometown of Shaoxing by holding a large outdoor and singing party at Jishan Pavilion.⁵² The event emulated what they had learned from past visits to Huqiu (Tight Hill), a historical, religious and scenic site outside Suzhou city, where locals annually celebrated mid-autumn. As reported by the essayist, the Shaoxing event gathered more than 700 local townsmen, who came with their own wines and food. Like fish scales, their mats, on which they frolicked, lined up on the ground by the pavilion. Over one hundred of the revelers were *kunqu* singers, the essayist estimated. When they sang famous arias from the classical *kunqu* opera *Washing Silk* (*Wanshaji*), their melodies flowed like waves, and echoed among hills and valleys around them. The highlight of the event was, however, a performance of more than a dozen operatic scenes by Zhang Dai's household performers. It attracted more than 1,000 observers, and went on until the wee hours. Enthralled, the audiences did not make any sound while watching the show.

This outdoor and musical celebration in Shaoxing differed from the Huqiu event that Zhang Dai and his friend emulated, a fact that underscores change and continuity in late Ming music traditions. The Huqiu celebration at Mid-Autumn was a traditional and well-known event. In the early 1590s, Yuan Hongdao (1568–1610) witnessed and wrote about it;⁵³ what he wrote is very similar to what Zhang Dai experienced sometime before 1631, the year of his Shaoxing celebration.

As described by Zhang Dai, the Huqiu event progressed from communal frolicking at dusk to solo presentations by virtuoso singers

late at night.⁵⁴ The event was attended by all kinds of locals: elite gentlemen and their families and servants, commoner men and women, locals and sojourners, courtesans and entertainers, rascals and the unemployed. Gathering at scenic and famous spots throughout the Huqiu area, such as the *Qianrenshi* (Thousand People's Stone Terrace) and *Shijianshi* (Sword-testing Stone), they would revel with abandon.

There was, however, a ritualized program. Around dusk, tens of music bands would begin to play *guchui* music thunderously, creating a festive soundscape. By around 7 pm, *kunqu* singing accompanied by string and wind instrumental playing began to gradually replace drum and gong music, even though musical timbres, structures and styles were still mingled at that time. Then, as the night progressed, elite families would retreat to their boat-houses, holding private banquets there, enjoying household entertainers' singing of northern and southern arias, each with their distinctive melodies, rhythms, and lyrics. By around 10 pm, playing of orchestral music ceased, and solo singing accompanied by the vertical flute (*dongxiao*) became audible, and their elegant expressions appreciated. By midnight, when the Huqiu site became quiet and was lit by only moonlight, *kunqu* virtuoso singers would ascend to the *Qianrenshi*, and musically compete with one another. The winner, as judged by the audience, would perform the finale of the event. Then and there, he would sing solo and without instrumental accompaniment. Coming out of his mouth like silkworms spitting out continuous threads were his melodies; they would rise up to the sky splitting mountain rocks and piercing through clouds. Unfolding like waves going up and down, every tone of the melodies and every word he sang would reach the ears and hearts of the appreciative audience sitting on the stone terrace. Mesmerized, they dared not clap their hands or move their bodies to the rhythm of the music. They could only nod their heads to show their admiration for the master and his artistry.

Immortalizing *kunqu* singing at Huqiu with his enchanting words, Zhang Dai demonstrated how he and his musical partners learned and adjusted as they made music as needed. Like their less fortunate or wealthy contemporaries, these elites engaged with music diversely and purposefully, a practice that the essayist analyzed insightfully with his description of the carnival at West Lake in Hangzhou, which took place annually on the seventh day of the seventh month of the year. Zhang divided musical revelers there into five types, only three of which would engage with music actively and substantively.⁵⁵ The first type sang and danced under the moon but hardly spent time viewing it. The second type took the occasion to have fun with their lovers or erotic partners; they hardly looked at the moon or heard the music played there. The third type sang songs and arias on pleasure boats with celebrated

courtesans or monks with nothing better to do. They would look up to the moon as much as they would want people to look at them; their singing was a way to draw people's attention to themselves. The fourth type were drunken and boisterous men who made a lot of noise, singing tunes with no lyrics—and probably out of tune. They viewed the moon and wanted people to notice them, but they had nothing to show. The fifth type would moor their small boats under trees by lake banks or quiet coves. There, they and their intimate and sophisticated friends would view the moon, sipping tea, chatting, chanting, and singing. They did not want people to notice them or their exclusive games. That was how Zhang Dai and his elite friends made music by and for themselves.

They did so because they know how music sounds out individual identities and social interactions. That Zhang Dai perspicaciously grasped such functions of music is clear, a fact attested by his reports on musical and social practices in Yangzhou, a city he repeatedly visited, or passed through, in the 1630s.⁵⁶ At the Twenty-four Bridges area, a historical site and a renowned entertainment quarter in the city, the essayist found nine alleys of brothels and parlors, where hundreds of courtesans dressed up every night trying to attract clients. As an informed and sensitive listener, Zhang noticed that when courtesans failed to catch clients early in the nights, they would sing popular tunes like “Pipoyu” (Breaking jade) to mark time, and to keep themselves and their servants alert for potential clients.

In the same city, Zhang Dai observed how men bought concubines as “slender horses” (*shouma*).⁵⁷ Witnessing interactions among interested buyers, scheming matchmakers, and prospective concubines, Zhang noticed how music was performed to create a festive soundscape for the transactions. The farewell party for the concubines newly bought would sing short and popular songs accompanied by string instruments (*xiaochang xiansuo*). Their receiving party would sing the same songs with *guchui* accompaniments—the sounds would be louder, and more festive! Neither parties would stage opera shows, which were probably too expensive and too grand.

Also in Yangzhou, Zhang Dai noticed how music would help define carnivals and their ritual and/or mundane practices. He noted that, at Qingming time, Yangzhou townsmen would present ritual offerings at their ancestors' graves. On their way to the ritual sites, they would, however, do sightseeing and other outdoor and leisurely activities. Superficially, what Yangzhou townsmen did was similar to what revelers did at other ritual times and festival sites throughout the Jiangnan region. The essayist, however, pointed out that something that happened in Yangzhou was distinctive. Its carnival of music making, shopping,

and frolicking would stretch on for miles. Reveling there were all kinds of Yangzhou people: elite and commoner townsmen, gamblers and peddlers, celebrated courtesans, and hired instrumentalists playing *ruan* lutes and plucking zithers, and blind balladeers telling stories with musical tones and rhythms. Zhang Dai noticed how the Yangzhou *qingming* soundscape was distinctive in its geographical layout, revelers' identities, and the repertoires they performed.

Zhang Dai did not become a sophisticated master-connoisseur-ethnographer by passively observing music events in his life. He actively engaged in music making as a producer and artistic director who controlled artistic and social negotiations, and wrote about the events with pride. One day late in 1626, heavy snow fell on Shaoxing, creating a scene that the essayist found most charming.⁵⁸ Right after the snow had stopped, he went to the city god temple on Dragon Mountain with an entourage of five servant-entertainers. Viewing the scene panoramically there, he sipped wine and had two household entertainers perform. Ma Xiaoqing sang with flute accompaniment provided by Li Jiesheng. The recital did not last, as the air was too cold for the musicians to make resonant sounds. Unsuccessful as the recital was, it was a private performance, one that a late Ming elite like Zhang Dai could demand as he wanted.

Zhang Dai was a creative and talented producer of operatic shows, one who actively participated in the wave of staging operas to expose Wei Zhongxian's atrocities soon after the abusive eunuch's execution—staging opera was a contemporary means of public and social-political discourse. In 1628, the essayist produced a version of *Bingshanji* (Story of the icy mountain), an exposé of the evil eunuch, at the city god temple in Shaoxing, attracting thousands of audiences.⁵⁹ In the autumn of that year, Zhang Dai went to Yanzhou in Shangdong and had the opera performed as a birthday present for his father.

Soon after that performance, the father had a party for Mr. Liu Banfang, a local governor, who remarked that the drama of *Bingshanji* missed several key events in Wei Zhongxian's biography of abuses. Responding to Mr. Liu's casual remark, Zhang, who was obviously at the party, drafted, overnight, scripts for seven additional scenes, dramatizing the events Governor Liu referenced. Also in the same night, the essayist rehearsed the new scenes with his household entertainers, and had it performed at the governor's official residence in the following day. It took the governor by surprise. Upon learning that the additional scenes were created overnight, the governor paid a courtesy call to Zhang Dai's father, thanking him and the author, and took the latter as a personal friend. That Zhang Dai could produce operatic scenes and

performances overnight says a lot about his skills as an operatic dramatist and producer.

Zhang Dai demonstrated the same talents for purposeful productions in the following year. One day after the Mid-Autumn Festival in 1629, Zhang and his entourage of household servant-entertainers took a boat trip on the Yangzi River, departing from Zhenjiang for Yanzhou.⁶⁰ Passing Beigu in the afternoon, he moored his boat by the riverbank. There he witnessed a most enchanting scene: as the sky turned dark, and moonlight poured into the river, its waves sucked down and popped up water bubbles, creating a screen of white mist. Shortly after, Zhang Dai moved his boat to a nearby spot and from there went uphill to the famous Jinshansi (Gold Mountain Temple). There he found darkened halls of the temple surrounded by trees, and between them, rays of moonlight. There and then, Zhang Dai ordered his servant-entertainers to light up torches to illuminate the temple hall, and made it into a theatre. Deliberately, he had his servant-entertainers perform military scenes, shows that dramatized a historically celebrated battle in 1129, when the army and navy of Han Shizhong (1089–1151) battled with and stopped the invading Jurchens at Huangtiandang, a site near the Jianshanshi.

The performance made loud music and woke up all the monks in the temple. Trying to see the performance more clearly, an old monk rubbed his eyes with the backs of his hands; being amazed, he opened his mouth wide, yawning, laughing, and trying to ask questions at the same time, Zhang Dai noticed. It was almost dawn, when the essayist's improvised performance finally ended. When his boat set sail, a monk came to the river bank and gazed at it for a long time, asking whether the performers were men, ghosts, or monsters.

This performance of Zhang Dai and his report of it was musically, socially and politically multivalent. Did he stage it as an operatic prank? Was it a show of the author's historical erudition and patriotic feelings? Was it an aesthetic act to immortalize an enchanting evening at a sacred site by puncturing it with a noisy and secular performance? How did Zhang Dai and his entertainers pull off such a show at a moment's notice? What kind of actors and actresses could perform on demand and without rehearsals? However one answers these questions, which Zhang Dai evoked but did not answer, one has to probe deeply beneath what, why, and how the late Ming elite made music.

The second stage of Zhang Dai's music life was filled with artistic and social events, which clearly afforded an artistic and social time and site for Zhang to assert his personal and elitist self. His assertion is forceful

because he musically engaged with and among his commoner or elite contemporaries, generating distinctive soundscapes and social-political sites and communities. Some members of these communities were life-long and musically sophisticated friends whose presence and agency underscore Zhang Dai's being. Their names included, for example, Qin Yisheng, Qi Zhixiang (1627 *juren*), Qi Biaoqia (1602–45), Lu Yungu, and Fan Changbai. A dandy like Zhang Dai, Qin Yisheng liked to travel, patronize courtesans and entertainers, sing songs, play musical instruments, and attend operatic shows.⁶¹ Qin had neither household entertainers nor parties of his own, but he would attend all kinds of artistic shows. He was always the last one lingering at performance sites, gazing broadly with his sparkling eyes, and intellectually reviewing the show that he had just experienced. His obsession with opera echoed that of Zhang Dai. Qi Biaoqia was a heroic Ming martyr and a celebrated and prolific late Ming opera critic and historian—his repertory list of operas, and his diary of watching theatrical shows is a primary source in late Ming opera history.⁶²

Lu Yungu was a precocious musician, who excelled in playing the fiddle, the mouth-organ and flutes, and liked to improvise flute (*dongxiao*) melodies with fellow musicians.⁶³ His accompanying of Li Yusheng's singing made a perfect match with the human and bamboo melodies. His duet performance with Wang Ruizhi was something no other musician acquaintances of Zhang Dai could rival. Fan was a connoisseur planter of orchids and potted plants but a mediocre *qin* player.⁶⁴ He had learned *qin* music from both Wang Lü'e and Wang Benwu, and he practiced diligently, but he easily forgot the music he had learned, and could manage to play simple pieces only when led by more advanced players.

In addition to elite musicians, Zhang Dai also socialized with musical commoners and entertainers, such as Zhu Chusheng and Liu Jingting. A professional actress of *diao* opera, Zhu Chuseng was a dedicated professional.⁶⁵ She would discuss her scripts and performance practices with learned critics and connoisseurs. She would correct all performance mistakes singled out to her. She would dismiss performance partners who were not up to her standard. As a result, her shows were theatrically impeccable, and when they were staged by fellow entertainers, including those senior performers in Kunshan, their theatrical details could not be casually changed. Liu Jingting was a professional story-teller (*shuochang*) in Nanjing, who had a resonant voice and who knew how to manipulate tones and rhythm to dramatize his stories, features that connoisseur audiences like Zhang Dai applauded.⁶⁶

If these musical friends render Zhang Dai's musicality typical of late Ming elite gentlemen, their regular and frequent interactions sustain the essayist's musical development. He met with his artistic and musical friends regularly and frequently. And whenever they met, they performed for and with one another, showing off their talents and skills, and learning from one another. This friendly and musically productive process is what unfolded at an improvised gathering in the tenth month of 1634.⁶⁷ At that time, Zhang Dai and a female companion, namely Zhu Chusheng, an actress, were visiting Hangzhou and viewing red leaves at the Buxiyuan (Buxi Garden). There they met several artistic friends, whom Zhang Dai invited to his house for an improvised party. Once settled, they artistically interacted with one another. Painters would ply their trade: Zeng Bochen worked on a portrait of Zhao Chunqing, a distinguished gentleman, while Chen Zhanghou worked on a design on silk and in an ancient style. Musicians in the party promptly performed: Yang Yumin played the *sanxian* lute; Luo San sang popular songs; Liu Jiu played his *xiao* flute.

After a round of singing and instrumental playing, Yang Yumin musically narrated (*shuo*), in the northern style, a scene from the popular story of *Jinpinmei*, articulating his performance with rhythmic and dramatic strikes of his *xingmu* (short wooden blocks), making everyone laugh. Following that, Peng Tianxi, Luo San and Yang Yuming sang *kunqu* arias, while Zhu Chusheng and Chen Suzhi sang *diaoqiang* arias. In response to such exquisite performance, Chen Houzhang sang folksongs with Zhang Dai's *qin* accompaniment.

By that time everyone but Zhao Chunqing had performed; realizing that, he apologized for his lack of performance skills. Seizing the moment to make Zhao Chunqing perform, Zhang Dai told the Tang dynasty story involving Fei Man, a military general and Wu Daozi, a celebrated painter. To honor his deceased mother, Fei Man wanted to install a ritual painting on a temple wall, and commissioned Wu Daozi to produce one. He agreed but requested Fei Man to do a sword dance, claiming that the general's fast choreography would promote communications with the dead. Thus Fei Man did a martial and vigorous sword dance, astonishing his audiences with speedy and vigorous movements, and prompting Wu Daozi to draw with the speed of wind, completing the requested work instantly. Thus teased, Zhao Chunqing grabbed a bamboo whip, and performed a non-Han twirling dance (*huxuanwu*), making everyone laugh with joy.

The party was not an isolated event. In the winter of 1638, Zhang Dai was invited to join a hunting party at Niushoushan, a Nanjing suburb.⁶⁸ In addition to Zhang's clansmen and friends, the party was also attended

by five courtesans: Wang Yuesheng, a courtesan friend of Zhang Dai's; Gu Mei (1619–44) and Dong Xiaowan (1526–1651), two of the eight celebrated Nanjing courtesans of the time; Li Shi, a *qin* performer and singer; and Yang Shi, whose musical skills were unspecified. At night, the hunting party feasted on their games, and enjoyed operatic performances by the courtesans. Their femininity, celebrity and musicality clearly made the hunting party an unforgettable event for Zhang Dai. It also underscored the ways late Ming elite and commoners, and men and women negotiated with one another musically and socially.

Such negotiations unfolded dynamically and served their participants in musical and social ways. In late 1630, Zhang Dai was invited to an operatic performance by Nanjing courtesans who sang and acted to promote themselves.⁶⁹ To advance their operatic artistry, they not only practiced diligently, but also elicited help from professional performers, esteemed coaches and critics; they also actively invited elite gentlemen/critics, like Zhang Dai, to their shows. This was how Nanjing courtesans, such as Yang Yuan, Yang Neng, Gu Mei, Li Shi, and Dong Xiaowan, built their reputation, Zhang Dai claimed.

To get Zhang Dai to their show, the courtesans extended their invitation through Yao Jianshu, a painter and a friend of Zhang Dai. He accepted, and went to see their show. Getting there in the afternoon, he saw a performance of *Xilouji* (Story of the west mansion) by young and professional actors—the courtesans would only perform in the evening. Two among the young performers were Ma Xiaoqing and Lu Ziyun, former members of Zhang's household troupe. Realizing Zhang Dai was in the audience, they performed with care and zest. By the time they did the seventh scene of their drama, their distinctive performance became clear to all in the audience. Thus, Yang Yuan, one of the courtesan hosts and a performer for the evening show, went backstage and asked Ma Xiaoqing what was going on.

Ma Xiaoqing explained to Yang Yuan that Zhang Dai, their former owner and celebrated opera master-critic was in the audience. He had high and intimidating standards. Whenever performers went to his house to teach or to perform, they crossed the threshold of his stage like they had to walk across the cutting edge of a sword. They had to do their best to satisfy a discriminating master and critic, Xiaoqing declared.

Realizing who Zhang Dai was, Yang Yuan came out to the audience hall and greeted the author there. And instead of letting the professional actors finish their performance of *Xilouji*, the courtesan-performers started their show of *Xunqinji* (Searching for parents). Performing the

role of Zhou Yu, the father character in the drama, Yang Yuan felt intimidated by Zhang Dai's presence. She kept glancing at him, trying to impress him but could hardly sing with her full voice. Zhang Dai wanted to flatter her, but found no appropriate moments to do it. Tension between them continued for a while until Zhang found appropriate moments and excuses to make a couple of encore calls. Thus encouraged, Yang performed with no further worries, and then the show unfolded smoothly.

After this incident, whenever the courtesans put on shows, they would invite Zhang Dai to attend as their coach and critic. Until he showed up, they would not begin their performances. As a result, a mutually beneficial relationship between Zhang Dai and the courtesans developed. Some courtesans became more celebrated because of Zhang Dai's presence and involvement at their shows, and he also became more famous because of them, the author wryly declared.

Zhang Dai deserved this fame: he mastered the art of musical-social-political negotiations, a fact that his reception for Prince Lu attested.⁷⁰ In the fall of 1645, soon after he set up his transient court in Shaoxing, the prince paid a formal visit to Zhang Dai's mansion. To receive the prince, Zhang Dai had to stage a grand reception. Finding no established ceremonial procedures for a princely visit to the home of an elite gentleman with no official degrees or official positions, Zhang Dai had to improvise a grand but unique welcome ceremony. Thus, he prepared a throne in the main hall of his house, and packed the hall with ritual and elaborate furniture, leaving little space for ceremonial actions—was this a faux pas? Dressed in full regalia, Prince Lu arrived, and Zhang Dai hosted him as his official-subject. To entertain the prince, the essayist prepared a seven-course banquet, dishes and beverages which were presented to the guest by kneel-walking (*guijin*) servants—judging from the way Zhang Dai highlighted it, the servants' movements were ritually and socially uncommon.

Between each course of the banquet, a round of music and dance performance was presented. The musical highlight of the ceremonial event was, however, a strategically prepared performance of *Maiyoulang* (*Oil Peddler*), which tells the love story between a lowly oil peddler and a celebrated courtesan that took place during the turbulent transition between the Northern and Southern Song dynasties. The performance referenced a Shaoxing myth: a supernatural terracotta horse carried a desperately fleeing Northern Song prince, namely, Zhao Gou (1107–80; reigned 1127–79) across the Yangzi River to safety and to the Southern Song throne, and become Gaozong, the founder of Southern Song China. Under normal conditions, Zhao Gou, the ninth son of Emperor

Huizong (1082–1135; reigned 1100–1126) would have had no legitimate claim to become emperor. However, the invading Jurchens' kidnapping of Emperor Huizong and Emperor Qinzong (1100–1156; reigned Jan, 1126 to March, 1127), Zhao Gou's father and elder brother, to the north generated a political vacuum in which he became the only available and legitimate candidate to lead Song loyalist forces.⁷¹ The performance greatly pleased Prince Lu, as his identity, situation, and political ambition closely paralleled those of Zhao Gou, the fleeing prince.

Following this performance of *Maiyoulang*, ten-plus vernacular shows sung with *yi yang* music styles were also presented to entertain the prince. Throughout the ceremonial day, the prince and Zhang Dai conversed and drank wine like friends. By the time Prince Lu got ready to depart, he could only walk with the help of two court escorts. As he went through the front gate of his host's compound, he ordered his escorts to inform his host that he had a most pleasurable day.

In addition to face-to-face interactions at opera performance sites and events like the parties and receptions noted above, Zhang Dai discussed music with his associates via letters. The author's letter to He Zixiang, a fellow *qin* player, manifests the essayist's musical ideals concisely. Paraphrased, it reads as follows:⁷²

Recently, I had heard *qin* playing by He Mingtai and Wang Benwu. The former could not make his rhythms (*ban*) dynamic (*huo*), so that his music sounded stuffed (*shi*). The latter over practiced, so that his music displayed slickness (*you*) but no rareness (*sheng*). Performance deficiencies of both men are serious; that of Wang Benwu is particularly fatal. Why? In *qin* music performance, beginners are faulted for not thoroughly mastering (*shou*) compositions and finger techniques needed for their realization of the works. However, when beginners have learned to play the compositions smoothly, their playing could be faulted for lacking *shengqi* (aura of rareness). The term did not mean what resulted from performers' memory gaps or rough, erroneous, and interrupted playing. It only refers to something genuine, something that transcends both *qin* players' performance techniques or the silk strings stretched over the musical sound boxes of their instruments. It is something that *qin* masters of the past projected when they played musical vibratos and slides with dexterous fingers and expressive minds. It is something that emerged when the masters plucked *qin* strings to produce nuanced sounds, generating unexpected expressions with smart and communicative calls and responses, and with intriguing rhythmic pauses and fermatas. This musical *shengqi* was something that the master players did not consciously pursue and the average audience did not fully grasp. It would only emerge when a performer has mastered his music, cleared irrelevant thoughts from his mind, and immersed himself in his playing.

It is what I have called the method and aura (*qi*) of performance mastery and rareness (*lianshou huansheng*). It is what defines superlative performances, regardless whether they are presentations of *qin* playing, lute plucking, flute blowing, song singing, acting on stage, kicking balls, painting, writing calligraphy, and composing

an essay or poetry. Artists who have this aura of performance mastery and rareness would achieve sublimity; those who do not would sink to the dregs.

As *qin* performers, we have to reach out to this method and aura. Nowadays, Suzhou *qin* performers like to play tones one by one. They would not pluck any tone until sounds of the previous ones have completely died out. The long gaps among tones break their musical logic and continuity, rendering their performance and expressions lifeless. This is a dead end for *qin* performance. It is not what we should adopt. Would you agree with me, my Brother He, who has aspired to be a *qin* master like Zhong Ziqi was?

What Zhang Dai communicated with He Zixiang is personal and allusive, but it is something insightful, practical, and not unknown to Chinese and non-Chinese music performers and theorists. Culturally and historically, it is not unrelated to what traditional Chinese musicians label as divine nuances (*shenyun*) or lingering nuances (*yuyin*). As ideals for or results of performance, it is not unrelated to what international anthropologists, musicologists, and psychologists debate as elocutionary communications of performance, musical groove, or creative flow.⁷³ It is significant that what Zhang Dai grasped and discussed with his music friends four centuries ago echoes with the latest theories about music and performance.

ZHANG DAI MAKES MUSIC WITH DREAMY WORDS

When Zhang Dai entertained Prince Lu in 1645, he had hoped that the Ming empire could still be revived and that he could be instrumental. He hoped fruitlessly, and he soon became a war refugee, moving from one home to another. In September 1649, he settled down as a tenant at Kuaiyuan by the foot of Dragon Mountain. By that time, he had lost everything except his historical documents, writing projects, and a defective *qin*. Living a destitute life with his wives and children, he had neither the resources nor occasions to give musical parties or operatic shows like the elite, rich and indulgent music master that he was before 1645.

After 1646, Zhang Dai began the third stage of his music life, which lasted until his death in 1680. During this long period, the essayist might have attended some music parties or operas while traveling and socializing with friends old and new inside and outside his home in the Happiness Garden. He did not, however, write about such music experiences, if he had them. He chose to dream and write about his music making in the earlier years of his life, producing his celebrated *Tao'an mengyi*, which includes scores of revealing essays on music and

music life in late Ming China. It is noteworthy that the anthology hardly references horrendous events and human suffering that many traumatized Jiangnan elite men detailed in their diaries, memoirs, and occasional writings.⁷⁴

In addition to dreamy reports about music parties and shows, old, destitute, and loyalist Zhang Dai wrote about music theory and *qin* music, a fact that his *Yehangchuan*, and “Ting taichang tanqin he shi shishou” (“Ten poems written after listening to Minister Yang Zhengjing’s *qin* performance and songs”) register.⁷⁵ Written after 1666, *Yehangchuan*, an encyclopedia of fundamental cultural knowledge that Zhang Dai wrote for beginner scholars includes two chapters of notes on music history and theory. They evidence the minimum of musical knowledge that a culturally functional late Ming gentleman would master. Written in 1655, the set of ten musical and patriotic poems not only reveal Zhang’s creative use of sound and words, but also reference the ways late Ming *qin* players and audiences negotiated their loyalist and nostalgic sentiments for Ming China with music, instruments, memories, and words. As such, the set of poems aligns Zhang Dai with other loyalists struggling during the turbulent Ming-Qing transition.

Zhang Dai titled his set of poems as an actual and personal response to Director Yang Zhengjing’s performance. Reading Zhang Dai’s preface to the poems, it is clear that what he wrote is based more on dreams/musical imagination than on the sounds he actually heard. Zhang Dai never heard the loyalist director’s playing. He only learned about it from a poem by Wang Yuyi (1598–1662), who actually heard Director Yang’s performance and then wrote about it. The web of sounds, words, and loyalist imagination and sentiments that led the essayist to write his poems can be interpretively constructed as follows. Yang Zhengjing once composed and performed *qin* music for the last emperor of Ming China, Emperor Zhongzhen, a connoisseur of the genre. Pleased with Yang Zhengjing’s performance and compositions, the emperor not only awarded the musician with two *qin* instruments but also appointed him as a director (*qing*) at the Court of Ceremonials (*taichangsi*).

After Ming China collapsed, Yang Zhengjing lived in the Huai’an-Yangzhou area. There he met and played *qin* music for Wang Yuyi, a Ming loyalist who could “see/hear” Emperor Zhongzhen in the music the musician played. To commemorate Yang’s performance and his musical interactions with the deceased emperor, which signified the collapsed Ming China, Wang Yuyi wrote his “Ting Yang Taichang tanqin shi, bing xu” (Poem written after listening to Director Yang’s *qin* playing, with attached preface).

After reading Wang's poem, a manuscript of which was mailed to him, Zhang Dai experienced a rush of loyalist feelings, and was inspired to write his set of ten poems, expressing his own loyalist feelings and laments for the deceased Ming emperor. The poems unfold with many historical references to musical sounds, instruments, performance and musicians, demonstrating how late Ming music masters, such as Zhang Dai, negotiated personal and musical memories and social-political agendas with poetic words about music.

ZHANG DAI'S MUSIC ESSAYS AS LESSONS FOR WRITING LATE MING MUSIC HISTORY

Such musical negotiations and results are significant for understanding not only Zhang Dai's music life in late Ming China but also its distinctive culture, personalities, and society. Contemporary musicologists have established that in the last seventy or so years of its existence, Ming China experienced a critical, far-reaching and social-political transformation, one that generated an unprecedented rise of a commercialized, diverse, indulgent, and urbanized music culture. It produced substantive and sophisticated repertoires, theories, performance practices, and publications for *qin* music, *kunqu* operas, and popular songs, achievements that shaped music developments and practices in Qing and contemporary China. *Qin* music and *kunqu* operas still occupy critical niches in the music world of contemporary China. As a matter of fact, both genres are now admired for their subtle expressions and performance virtuosity, and are honored as UNESCO masterpieces of oral and intangible cultural heritage of humanity.

To comprehensively understand how and why such sophisticated music emerged in late Ming China, issues of agency, contexts, institutions, and meanings need to be addressed. And how and why it survived the turbulent Ming-Qing transition and was preserved for posterity are also questions that cannot be ignored. Was music a site and a means for frustrated elite gentlemen to indulgently dream or stage their selves? How did music and literature constitute or preserve their memories? How did they shape or were they shaped by biographical-cultural-social-political forces of the time?

Towards answering those questions, Zhang Dai's dreamy essays provide many clues. His trajectory of learning music through osmosis, and making music to satisfy cultural, expressive, and ritual needs suggest why music is an integral part of late Ming biography and history. His descriptions on the ways late Ming musicians practiced and negotiated

their arts obsessively help to explain not only how late Ming music can reach such superlative levels, but also why its repertoires and history are infused with meanings. And his distinctive telling of his music memories evokes aesthetic and performance subtleties that effervescently defined late Ming music and selves.

NOTES

- 1 For a current bibliography of Zhang Dai studies in Chinese, see Zhang Haixin, “Cankao wenxian,” in *Shuiping shanniao: Zhang Dai ji qi shiwen yanjiu* (Shanghai: Zhongxi shuyuan, 2012), 399–412; see also Zhou Xiao, “Cankao wenxian,” in “Zhang Dai xinkao,” MA Thesis, Jiejiang gongye daxue, 2016, 42–5. Three standard Chinese references are: Xia Xianchun, *Mingmo qicai—Zhang Dai lun* (Shanghai: Shehuikexueyuan chubanshe, 1989); Hu Yiwen, *Zhang Dai yanjiu* (Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002); Zhang Zetong, *Zhang Dai tangao* (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2009). Two scholarly studies in English are: Philip Kafalas, *In Limpid Dream* (Norwalk, CT: EastBridge, 2006); Jonathan D. Spence, *Return to Dragon Mountain: Memories of a Late Ming Man* (New York: Viking, 2007).
- 2 Two representative and recent studies on Zhang Dai’s musical activities are: Bai Jiaxin, “Wan Ming Zhang Dai de yinyue huodong yanjiu,” *Zhongyang yinyue xueyuan*, 2014, 1–46, and Mei Xiaoping, “Zhang Dai de yinyue sixiang yanjiu,” *Huangzhong/Journal of Wuhan Conservatory of Music* (2003, additional issue), 12–15.
- 3 I would like to acknowledge Kenneth Swope’s drawing my attention to the broad cultural and historical issues Zhang Dai’s works evoke, and to Lynne Struve’s publications on memory/dream production in the Ming-Qing transition.
- 4 There are multiple editions of the author’s works. The following editions are used in this study. Zhang Dai, *Yehangchuan* annotated by Jin Ping and Gong Mingde (Chengdu: Sichuan chubun jituan Sichuan wenyi chubanshe, 2002); Zhang Dai, *Xihu mengxun, zhuping* annotated by Lin Bangjun (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 2013); Zhang Dai, *Tao’an mengyi, zhuping* annotated by Lin Bangjun (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 2014); Xia Xianchun, *Zhang Dai shiwenji, zengdingben* (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 2014); Zhang Dai, *Kuaiyuan daogu* edited by Gao Xue’an and She Deyu (Hangzhou: Zhejiang guji chubanshe, 2014); Zhang Dai, *Langwan wenji* edited by Gao Yun (Changsha: Yuelu shuyuan 2016).
- 5 Zhang Dai, “Zixu,” in *Tao’an mengyi*, 1.
- 6 Lynn Struve has published extensively and insightfully on memory and dream writings produced during the Ming-Qing transition; see her “Confucian PTSD: Reading Trauma in a Chinese Youngster’s Memoir of 1653,” *History and Memory*, 16/2 (2004), 14–31; “Introduction to the Symposium: Memory and Chinese Texts,” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (Clear)*, Vol 27 (2005), 1–4; “Dreaming and Self-Search during the Ming Collapse: The ‘Xue Xiemeng Bijì’, 1642–1646,” *T’oung P’ao*, Second Series, Vol. 93, Fasc. 1/3 (2007), 159–192; “Self-Struggles of a Martyr: Memories, Dreams, and Obsessions in the Extant Diary of Huang Chunayo,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 69.2 (2009), 343–394; and *The Dreaming Mind and the End of the Ming World*, (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2019).
- 7 Philip A. Kafalas, “Mnemonic Locations: The Housing of Personal Memories in

- Prose from Ming and Qing,” *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (Clear)*, 27 (2005), 93–116; see in particular, 93–4.
- 8 Qi Biaoqia, “Xu,” in Zhang Dai, *Tao'an mengyi*, 6: 234.
- 9 Wang Qi and Wang Siyi, *Sancai tuihui* (1607; reprint; Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1988); Shen Defu, *Wanli yehuo bian* (1619; reprint; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997). Zhang Dai, however, did produce historical narratives, such as his *Shiguishu*, in *Xixiu siku quanshu*, Vol. 318–20 (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1995).
- 10 It is unlikely but not impossible that heretofore unknown sources of Zhang Dai's music life and dramatic works might resurface.
- 11 Feng Menglong, *MingQing Minge shidiaoji* (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1987), and Zhou Zhibiao, *Wuyu cuiya*, in *Shanben xiqu congkan*, Vols. 12–13 (1616; reprint; Taipei: Xuesheng chubanshe, 1984–87).
- 12 Yin Ertao, *Huiyin mizhi* (1692 Sun Gan edition; reprint. Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 2013).
- 13 For a general survey, see Joseph S.C. Lam, “Ming Music and Ming History,” *Ming Studies*, No. 38 (1997), 21–62.
- 14 See Joseph S.C. Lam, “Taizu's Words and Deeds of State Sacrifices and Music,” in *State Sacrifices and Music in Ming China: Orthodoxy, Creativity, and Expressiveness* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), 37–53.
- 15 See Joseph S.C. Lam, “Zhu Quan, A Prince who Changed Ming Musical History,” in Craig Clunas, Jessica Harrison-Hall and Yuk-ping Luk, eds., *Ming China Courts and Contact* (London: British Museum, 2016), 87–93.
- 16 Zhu Quan, *Shenqi mipu* (Beijing: Zhongguo shudian, 2015). See also Xu Jian, “Mingdai 明代,” in *Qinshi xinbian* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2012), 203–60; see in particular 206–8.
- 17 See Joseph S.C. Lam, “Imperial Agency in Ming Music Culture,” in *Culture, Courtiers, and Competition: The Ming Court* (1368–1644) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 2008), 269–320.
- 18 For two artistic representations of Ming imperial and processional performance of wind and percussion instruments, see Na Chih-liang and William Kohler, *The Emperor's Procession: Two Scrolls of the Ming Dynasty* (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1970.). See the two paintings online: <https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%87%BA%E8%AD%A6%E5%85%A5%E8%B7%B8%E5%9B%BE/3612722>; accessed on September 15, 2017.
- 19 For an introduction to *shifang luogu*, see Yuan Jingfang, “Shifan luoguo,” in *Minzu qiyue* (Beijing: Renmin yinyue chubanshe, 1987), 439–64.
- 20 See Joseph S.C. Lam, “Shizong's Sericultural Ceremonials,” in *State Sacrifices and Music in Ming China*, 55–98.
- 21 For a survey of operatic music in Ming China, see Liao Ben and Liu Yanjun *Zhongguo xiqu fazhanshi* Vol. 3 (Taiyuan: Shanxi jiaoyu chubanshe, 2003); see in particular, 37–91.
- 22 See Chen Baoliang, “Xiuxian yu Yule shenhua,” in *Mingdai shehui shenhuoshi* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2004), 559–608.
- 23 For a cultural and historical introduction to the genre, See Joseph Lam, *Kunqu, The Classical Opera of Globalized China*, forthcoming.
- 24 Zhu Zaiyu, *Yuelüquanshu* (Beijing: Beijing tushuguan guji chubanshe, 1997); Zhou Zhibiao, *Wuyucuiya*, Vol. in *Guben shanben congshu* (Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1970).
- 25 See Zhou Yubo, *Mingdai minge yanjiu* (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2005);

- Zhou Yubo and Chen Shulu, comps., *Mingdai mingge ji* (Nanjing: Shifan daxue, 2009); Pei Yu, *Mingchao naxiequ* (Jinan: Shandong huabao chubanshe, 2009).
- 26 Data on the musical lives of Zhang Rulin and his sons and grandsons is taken from Zhang Dai, “Jiachuan,” “Fuchuan,” and “Wu yiren chuan,” in *Langhuan wenji*, *juan* 4: 117–49. For an insightful view on Zhang Rulin’s role as a grandfather and model in the Zhang family, see Spence, *Return to Dragon Mountain*, 47–110.
- 27 For a discussion on the dynamic nature of Ming education, see Sarah Schneewind, *Community Schools and the State in Ming China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006); see in particular “Education and Autocracy,” 109–111.
- 28 Zhang Dai, “Ziwei muzhiming,” in *Langhuan wenji*, 5: 160.
- 29 Zhang Dai, “Zhangshi shenji,” in *Tao’an mengyi*, 4: 119–20.
- 30 Zhang Dai, “Xinüe bu,” in *Kuaiyuan daogu*, 14: 108.
- 31 For a discussion on late Ming elites’ musical and verbal games and sources, see Yuming He, “The *Boxiao zhuji* and the World of Late Ming Popular Texts,” in *Home and the World: Editing the “Glorious Ming” in Woodblock-Printed Books of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2013), 17–73.
- 32 Zhang Dai, “Xinüe bu,” in *Kuaiyuan daogu*, 14: 109.
- 33 Zhang Dai, “Chuanlou,” in *Tao’an mengyi*, 8: 226–7; Zhang Dai, “Jiachuan,” in *Langhuan wenji*, 4: 127–8.
- 34 Zhang Dai, “Mulianxi,” in *Tao’an mengyi*, 6: 161–2.
- 35 Zhang Dai, “Wuyiren,” in *Langhuan wenji*, 4: 145.
- 36 Zhang Dai, “Longshan fangdeng” and “Shaoxing dengjing,” in *Tao’an mengyi*, 8: 219–20, and 6: 164–5.
- 37 Zhang Dai did not give clear dates in his descriptions of these musical personalities and their activities. Here, they are summarily discussed as agents and events that would have shaped Zhang Dai’s musicality.
- 38 Zhang Dai, “Peng Tianxi chuanxi,” in *Tao’an mengyi*, 6: 159.
- 39 Zhang Dai, “Qi Yiyuan xianyun xiaolin ge,” in *Zhang Dai shiwenji*, 63.
- 40 Zhang Dai, “Zhu Yunlai nüxi,” in *Tao’an mengyi*, 2: 41–2.
- 41 Zhang Dai, “Liu Huijie nüxi,” in *Tao’an mengyi*, 5: 151.
- 42 Zhang Dai, “Qi Zhixiang pi,” in *Tao’an mengyi*, 123–4.
- 43 Zhang Dai, “Ji yiling wen,” in *Langhuan wenji*, 6: 204.
- 44 Yang Ye translated, “An Epitaph for Myself,” in *Vignettes from the Late Ming* (Seattle, WA and London: University of Washington Press, 1999), 98–101.
- 45 Zhang Dai, “Ponggongchi,” in *Tao’an mengyi*, 7: 203.
- 46 Zhang Dai, “Shaoxing qinpi,” in *Tao’an mengyi*, 2: 43–5.
- 47 Zhang Dai, “Sishe xiaoqi,” in *Langhuan wenji*, 2: 73.
- 48 Zhang Dai, “‘Lülü’ and ‘Yuelü,’” in *Yehangchuan*, 9: 237–46.
- 49 Zhang Dai, “Fengmen hedang,” in *Tao’an mengyi*, 1: 20–21.
- 50 Zhang Dai, “Yanzhou yuewu,” in *Tao’an mengyi*, 4: 99.
- 51 See William S. Atwell, “Ming Observers of Ming Decline: Some Chinese Views on the ‘Seventeenth-Century Crisis’ in Comparative Perspective,” *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, No. 2 (1988), 316–48; see in particular, 333–5.

- 52 Zhang Dai, “Yun zhongqiu,” in *Tao'an mengyi*, 7: 207–9.
- 53 Yuan Hongdao, “Huqiu ji,” <http://tssc.timetw.com/60048.html>: accessed on August 15, 2017.
- 54 Zhang Dai, “Huqiu zhongqiu ye,” in *Tao'an mengyi*, 5: 144.
- 55 Zhang Dai, “Xihu qiyueban,” in *Tao'an mengyi*, 7: 193–5.
- 56 Zhang Dai, “Ershixi qiao fengyue,” in *Tao'an mengyi*, 4: 111–13.
- 57 Zhang Dai, “Yangzhou shouma,” in *Tao'an mengyi*, 5: 156–8.
- 58 Zhang Dai, “Longshan xue,” in *Tao'an mengyi*, 7: 202.
- 59 Zhang Dai, “Bingshanji,” in *Tao'an mengyi*, 7: 216–18.
- 60 Zhang Dai, “Jinshan yexi,” in *Tao'an mengyi*, 1: 16–17.
- 61 See Zhang Dai, “Ji Qin Yisheng wen,” in *Langhuan wenji*, 6: 201–3.
- 62 Zhao Suwen, *Qi Biaojia yanjiu* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2011).
- 63 Zhang Dai, “Lu Yungu chuan,” in *Zhang Dai shiwenji*, 365–6.
- 64 Zhang Dai, “Fan Changbai,” in *Tao'an mengyi*, 5: 127–9.
- 65 Zhang Dai, “Zhu Chusheng,” in *Tao'an mengyi*, 5: 154–5.
- 66 Zhang Dai, “Liu Jingting shuoshu,” in *Tao'an mengyi*, 5: 138–40.
- 67 Zhang Dai, “Buxiyuan,” in *Tao'an mengyi*, 4: 95–6.
- 68 Zhang Dai, “Niushoushan dalie,” in *Tao'an mengyi*, 4: 100–101.
- 69 Zhang Dai, “Guojianmen,” in *Tao'an mengyi*, 7: 214–15.
- 70 Zhang Dai, “Luwang,” in *Tao'an mengyi*, 250–51. Zhang Dai's grand feast and operatic entertainment was an elaborate and strategic gesture to prop up Prince Lu's determination/role as a Protector of the Realm (*jianguo*). Shortly before the prince's visit, Zhang Dai wrote to the latter and advised him to purge Ma Shiyong, a renegade official in his court. For Zhang's interactions with Prince Lu, see his “Luwang shijia” in *Shikuishu houji*, juan 5. See also Jonathan Spence, *Return to Dragon Mountain*, 206–20.
- 71 For a historical account of the events that led to Zhao Gou's claiming of the Song throne, see Wang Zhengyu, *Huangyin wudao Song Gaozong* (Licentious and tyrannical Emperor Gaozong) (Shijiazhuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 2007), 1–21. See also Frederic Mote, *Imperial China, 900–1800* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1999), 289–99.
- 72 Zhang Dai, “Yu He Zixiang,” in *Langhuan wenji*, 3: 110–11.
- 73 For theories on music groove, see Charles Keil and Stephen Feld, *Music Grooves: Essays and Dialogues* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994); for music flow, see Mihaly Csikszentmihaly, *Flow: the Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper and Row, 1994) and *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1996).
- 74 For a survey of these documents on Ming–Qing traumas, see Lynn Struve, *The Ming–Qing Conflict, 1919–1683: A Historiography and Source Guide* (Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies, 1998); see in particular, “The Jiangnan Region, 1645–1659,” 240–53.
- 75 Zhang Dai, “Ting taichang tanqin heshi shishou, you xu,” in Xia Xianchun, *Zhang Dai shiwenji*, 110–114; see also Zhang Zetong, “Cong ‘Ting taichang tanqin heshi shishou’ kan Zhang Dai de yimin qinxu,” in *Zhang Dai tangao*, 126–31.

CHAPTER 18

THE MAKING OF AN EMPRESS IN LIFE AND DEATH

Empresses Xiaoduan's and Xiaojing's burial goods in the Ding Mausoleum



Luk Yu-ping

In total, thirteen Ming emperors are buried at Mount Dayu, about 40 kilometers northwest of Beijing. Within this extensive imperial burial site, only the Ding Mausoleum (Dingling) has been excavated.¹ This was the resting place of the Wanli emperor (r. 1573–1620) and two empresses – Empress Xiaoduan or Wang Xijie (1564–1620) (Figure 18.1) and Empress Xiaojing (1565–1611), also née Wang (Figure 18.2). Empress Xiaoduan was the Wanli emperor's first and only empress, whereas Empress Xiaojing was posthumously elevated to the position of empress dowager as the mother of the subsequent Taichang emperor (r. 1620) and grandmother of the Tianqi emperor (r. 1621–27).



Figure 18.1 Portraits of the Wanli emperor (right) and Empress Xiaoduan (left), album leaves, ink and colors on silk, 65 x 51.4 cm (image), The Collection of National Palace Museum, Taipei



Figure 18.2 Portrait of Empress Xiaojing, album leaf, ink and colors on silk, 64.9 x 51.5 cm (image), The Collection of National Palace Museum, Taipei

The excavation of the Ding Mausoleum from 1956 to 1958 yielded spectacular finds of over 2,600 items. Some losses have occurred since the mausoleum was excavated, of which the most serious was the destruction of the corpses of Wanli, Xiaoduan and Xiaojing by angry mobs during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76).² A detailed excavation report of the site was published in 1990.³ This two-volume publication remains the primary source of information for contextualizing the condition in which objects were found in the Ding Mausoleum.⁴ As one of the major archaeological discoveries of modern China, the findings from the mausoleum have been widely referred to in various publications. The Ding Mausoleum is also a key reference for the study of the material culture of Ming empresses, given the scarcity of other examples that are directly connected to the physical bodies of these women. However, most publications tend to repeat the findings from the excavation report, and few have attempted to examine the burial goods in greater detail and from a broader, critical perspective.⁵

Empress Xiaoduan was the longest serving empress in Ming history. Although she did not bear a son, she was considered a model empress.⁶ The *History of the Ming* (*Ming shi*) describes her as having a dignified and cautious (*duanjin*) character, who served Wanli's mother Empress Dowager Li (1546–1614) well, who protected Xiaojing's son when he became crown prince, and did not display jealousy when Wanli favored other women.⁷ Her burial objects in the Ding Mausoleum can be considered a standard for an empress during the late Ming. On the other hand, Xiaojing was not initially buried at the Ding Mausoleum. She died as an imperial concubine and was buried at a separate location near the Eastern Well (Dongjing) of Mount Dayu.⁸ Her coffin and burial goods were transferred to the Ding Mausoleum and interred together with Xiaoduan and Wanli in 1620, eight years after she was first buried. She received additional burial objects befitting of her new posthumous title of empress dowager. A comparison of her burial objects to those of Empress Xiaoduan could reveal how ranking among imperial women was differentiated in the latter part of the Ming dynasty, how sumptuary laws were applied in practice, and how material goods played a role in shaping the identity of these women in life and death.

LAYOUT OF THE DING MAUSOLEUM

The Ding Mausoleum sits at the foot of Mount Dayu facing southeast. Construction began in the 10th lunar month of 1584, when the Wanli emperor was 28 years old, and was completed around 5 years later in the 6th lunar month of 1590.⁹ Wanli took great interest in the

construction of the mausoleum and visited the site several times during the five-year construction period, often accompanied by empress dowagers and consorts.¹⁰ The mausoleum remained unused until after the imperial couple died in 1620 – the Wanli emperor passed away three months after Xiaoduan, and they were interred together with Xiaojing in the underground site.

As was typical of Ming imperial architecture, the Ding Mausoleum was constructed along a central axis.¹¹ A series of gateways and halls led to a circular burial mound, underneath which was the underground palace (*xuangong*). The layout of the underground structure consists of a front, central and rear chambers that form a T-shape (Figure 18.3). The narrow central chamber further extends into two parallel side chambers. The coffins of Wanli, Xiaoduan, and Xiaojing were placed side-by-side on a single raised platform in the rear chamber. Wanli's coffin is located in the center; Xiaoduan's coffin is at the viewer's right side and Xiaojing's coffin is on the left. In Ming-dynasty terms, Xiaoduan's position in relation to Wanli is higher and more prestigious than that of Xiaojing's, which honors Xiaoduan's rank as the principal empress.¹²



Figure 18.3 The underground palace of the Ding Mausoleum, looking in from the front chamber. © Zjm7100 | [Dreamstime.com](#)

In the central chamber of the Ding Mausoleum, there are three thrones made of carved white marble, offerings also made of marble as

well as ‘everlasting lamps’ (*changming deng*), which are large blue-and-white porcelain basins filled with oil and a wick for lighting (Figure 18.4). Interestingly, the two side chambers in the Ding Mausoleum were left unused. It has been speculated that all three coffins were put into the rear chamber because of haste and difficulties in the burial process, which took place under poor weather conditions.¹³ However, according to Liu Yi, the side chambers in early Ming imperial mausolea were intended for the entombment of lower ranked consorts. It was from the Tianshun period (1457–64) onwards that only empresses had the right to be buried with the emperor.¹⁴ The side chambers continued to be included in the layout as a formality.¹⁵

Burial goods in the Ding Mausoleum were mainly located in the rear chamber together with the coffins.¹⁶ Some were located against the walls of the chamber, while most were around, on top, or inside the coffins. The excavation report numbered the cases containing burial objects in the rear chamber X1 to X26.¹⁷ The intended recipient of the burial goods in these cases is ascertained primarily based on their location in relation to the coffins and by their content. For instance, X18, X19, and X20 are located between Xiaoduan’s and Wanli’s coffins.¹⁸ They contain the emperor’s seal, commemorative document, armory and weapons, and are clearly his burial objects.

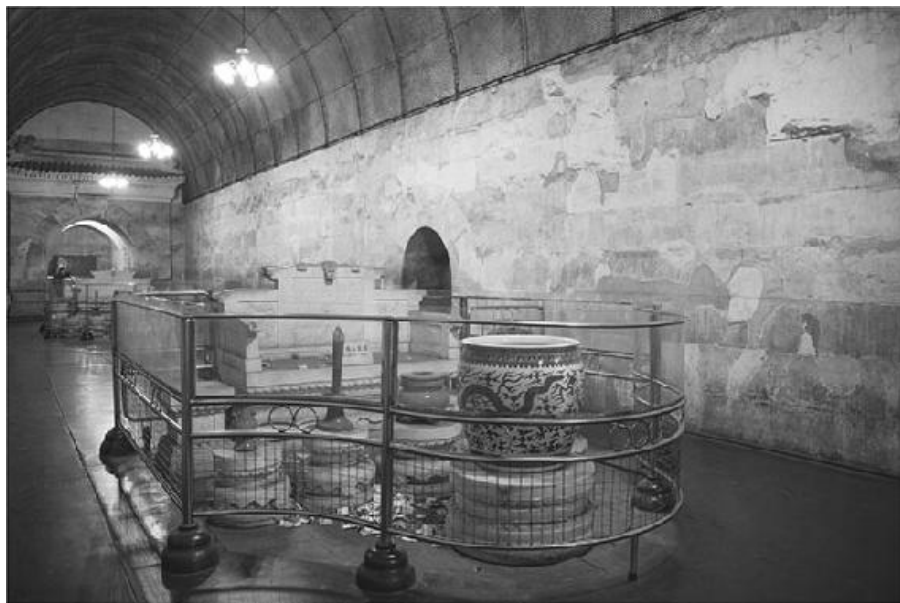


Figure 18.4 The marble thrones with large blue-and-white porcelain basins in their current arrangement inside the Ding Mausoleum. © Zjm7100 | [Dreamstime.com](https://www.dreamstime.com/)

THE PROBLEM OF XIAOJING'S RANK

At the age of 13, Empress Xiaoduan was selected to be the bride of the sixteen-year-old Wanli emperor.¹⁹ From then until her death in 1620, she remained the empress. She had one daughter, Princess Rongchang (1582–1647), but no sons.²⁰ Historical records praise her as a virtuous empress and Wanli himself could not fault her even though he favored another woman, Consort Zheng (Zheng *guifei*) (1565–1630).²¹ In contrast, Xiaojing's status was fraught throughout her life and even after her death. She began her career at court as a palace maid serving the mother of the Wanli emperor, Empress Dowager Li.²² One encounter with the emperor, which he initially tried to deny, left her pregnant with a child, Zhu Changluo (1582–1620), who would later become the Taichang emperor (r. 1620). It was only through the intervention of Empress Dowager Li that her pregnancy was officially recognized and she was granted the title of *Gongfei* (a title for an imperial concubine of the second rank).

Xiaojing would go on to have another child – a daughter who died in infancy, but Wanli never favored her or their children. Instead, he was enamored with Consort Zheng who bore him three sons and three daughters. By rule of primogeniture, Xiaojing's son Zhu Changluo should have been made heir to the throne, but Wanli resisted as he wanted the throne to be passed to his son with Consort Zheng. This succession dispute and power struggle became known as the 'foundation of the state' (*guoben*) controversy that had lasting political consequences for the Wanli reign.²³ The emperor finally bowed to pressure from his ministers and his mother and made Zhu Changluo crown prince when he turned twenty in 1601. At that point, Xiaojing should have been elevated to the position of *Huang guifei* (imperial concubine, first rank and one below the empress). But Wanli once again stalled, probably because this change would put Xiaojing on equal footing with his favorite Consort Zheng. Xiaojing was finally granted this title in 1606, one year after Zhu Changluo's son was born.²⁴

Historical accounts paint a tragic picture of Xiaojing's life. She lived together with her son when he was young in the Jingren Palace on the east side of the Forbidden City.²⁵ Then in 1601, when he became crown prince, he was moved into a different palace and from then on mother and son were forbidden to meet.²⁶ Xiaojing was kept in her quarters, apparently held under surveillance controlled by a jealous Consort Zheng.²⁷ In 1611 when she fell ill, her son sought permission to visit her. The *History of the Ming* records that the crown prince found her palace doors locked, which had to be forced opened.²⁸ Xiaojing had turned

blind by then (as a result of her tears, according to popular accounts).²⁹ She died at the age of 46 shortly after this reunion.

Wanli's ambivalence towards Xiaojing was evident not only in the treatment of her in life but also in the arrangement of her burial, which was delayed repeatedly after her death. The selection of a suitable burial site went ahead only after officials in the Ministry of Rites lobbied for it. One matter that arose was what kind of burial she would be entitled to since, as the Ministry of Rites pointed out, there was no precedent in the Ming dynasty for the burial of an imperial concubine of the first rank who was already the mother of the crown prince.³⁰ Given this, the Ministry recommended a burial of greater rather than less grandeur. Determining a burial appropriate for Xiaojing's rank was no trivial matter since the performance of correct ritual protocol (*li*) was central to politics and governance during the Ming as well as other dynasties in China's history.³¹ While the decision-making process for Xiaojing's burial was not recorded in historical sources, the Wanli emperor did agree to set aside 150,000 *liang* of silver for the construction of her tomb.³² She was finally interred near the Eastern Well at Mount Dayu after a ten-month wait.³³

The problem of Xiaojing's rank lingered after her death and burial. When Zhu Changluo became the Taichang emperor, he planned to posthumously instate her to the position of empress dowager, but he was not able to complete this task before his death after one month on the throne. One of the thorny issues that had to be resolved first was Wanli's final decree asking for Consort Zheng to be made an empress so that she could join him in the Ding Mausoleum after her death.³⁴ The matter was finally settled under the Tianqi emperor – ministers vetoed Wanli's decree and Xiaojing was made empress dowager.³⁵ As will be discussed below, this history and complex web of relationships would inform the choice of burial goods found in the Ding Mausoleum.

BURIAL GOODS FOR BOTH EMPRESSES

The elevation of Xiaojing to the position of empress dowager followed correct protocol given that she was the mother of the emperor. Her reburial into the Ding Mausoleum must also have been seen as an opportunity to right past wrongs following the death of Wanli, as officials criticized Consort Zheng for her treatment of Xiaojing.³⁶ Some of the grave goods show the planning for the three tomb occupants as a single unit, for instance, the set of three marbled thrones and offerings in the central chamber, or 'spirit vessels' (*mingqi*) made of bronze and tin, representing utensils and furnishing from daily life, which were

produced in sets of three and found in cases located along the left wall in the rear chamber.³⁷

Other burial goods show an effort to treat Empresses Xiaoduan and Xiaojing equally. There are seven cases located to the right of Empress Xiaoduan's coffin on the raised platform, which contained her burial goods. Two of the cases (X25 and X26) are further away from her coffin and contain wooden figurines. The five cases (X1–5) close to Xiaoduan's coffin contain the following items:³⁸

X1 – headdress decorated with nine dragons and nine phoenixes

X2 – gilt bronze ladle, lacquer box, two gold hairpins with gems, jade *gu* tablet (*yu gugui*), sash made of gold filigree and pearls, two jade ornaments, gold censor-pendant, two pairs of earrings, headdress decorated with six dragons and six phoenixes, jade belt

X3 – wooden square seal. Half of the text is illegible but based on the surviving text it is carved with Xiaoduan's posthumous title in seal script.

X4 – Xiaoduan's commemorative document from the Tianqi emperor made of wooden plaques

X5 – Xiaoduan's commemorative document from the Wanli emperor made of wooden plaques

These objects are key markers of the empress' status, which she was expected to carry with her into the afterlife. The commemorative documents and seal bear her posthumous official title and provide textual proof of her position.³⁹ Several of the items in X2 can be matched with descriptions of the empress' dress and accoutrements in the *Da Ming huidian* (Collected Statutes of the Great Ming; henceforth *Statutes*) completed in 1587.⁴⁰ For example, a sash (*xiapei*) made with gold and pearls is listed as one element of the empress' routine court dress (*changfu*).⁴¹ The jade *gu* tablet with raised carvings for ceremonial use is part of an empress' formal ceremonial dress (*lifu*).⁴² The headdress with dragons and phoenixes is mentioned for both routine and ceremonial dress in the *Statutes*, and will be discussed further below.

The same objects are largely repeated in cases X12, X14, and X15 that are located next to Xiaojing's coffin on the left-hand-side. The items in these cases, listed according to table 36.4 in the excavation report, are

as follows:

X₁₂ – Xiaojing's wooden commemorative document and seal from the Tianqi emperor, placed together in one container

X₁₄ – gold pendant, two jade ornaments, lacquer box, jade *gu* tablet, sash made of gold filigree and pearls, jade belt, bronze hairpin, gilt bronze ladle, two gold hairpins with gems, four pairs of earrings, headdress decorated with three dragons and two phoenixes, six gemstones, 30 pearls⁴³

X₁₅ – headdress decorated with 12 dragons and 9 phoenixes

As the excavation report suggests, these three containers of burial goods were added for Xiaojing when her coffin was moved from the Eastern Well to the Ding Mausoleum. X₁₂ is self-explanatory, while X₁₄ and 15 contain items that Xiaojing would not have been eligible to use when she was an imperial concubine. For instance, headdresses with the dragon motif were reserved for the Ming empress.⁴⁴ Evidently, the privilege of being buried in the Ding Mausoleum was not sufficient; it was also important to provide Xiaojing with burial objects befitting of her new status.

Notably, each empress received two headdresses with different numbers of dragon and phoenix motifs.⁴⁵ The *Statutes* gives very detailed specifications of the headdresses that empresses should wear for both ceremonial and routine functions. For instance, it was established under the Yongle reign (r. 1403–24) that the empress' ceremonial headdress should be decorated with nine dragons and four phoenixes, while there should be two phoenixes and one dragon for the routine headdress. None of the four headdresses found in the Ding Mausoleum perfectly matches these specifications, which suggests the difference between ideal and reality, as well as possible changes and the loosening of sumptuary laws over time. As scholars have speculated, one of the headdresses should have been for ceremonial use and one for routine dress.⁴⁶ More concrete evidence of this may be found by comparing the headdresses to their representations in the album portraits of Empresses Xiaoduan and Xiaojing in the National Palace Museum, Taipei (Figure 18.1 and 18.2). In these portraits, Xiaoduan is shown wearing a dark-blue ceremonial garment with *di*-pheasant motifs together with a headdress without beaded tassels (*zhujie*), whereas in Xiaojing's portrait, she wears a headdress with tassels that is matched with the routine court dress in red. This creates a clear visual distinction between the two

women in the portraits. In terms of the actual headdresses, these portraits suggest that X₂ and X₁₄, which have beaded tassels, are meant for routine court dress, while X₁ and X₁₅, which do not have tassels, are meant for ceremonial dress in this instance.⁴⁷ It makes sense that Xiaoduan and Xiaojing were provided with both types of headdresses to ensure their status is fully preserved in the afterlife. In addition, based on the number of dragon and phoenix motifs on the headdresses and from images of their reconstructed state, it appears that efforts were made by the funerary organizers, led by the Ministry of Rites and eunuchs of the inner court, to ensure that neither empress is shown to be in a more prestigious position than the other.

There are two, possibly three, containers next to Xiaojing's coffin that contain burial goods meant to be shared by both empresses. X₇ contains pairs of 'spirit vessels' made of bronze and tin. They were found together with additional commemorative documents for Xiaoduan and Xiaojing made of tin, which clearly indicates that this material was intended for both empresses. X₁₇ could also be meant for both empresses. It contains a mixture of items, most of which appear in pairs, including socks, shoes, jade belts, jade pendants with carved dragon designs and leather wrappings.⁴⁸ According to the *Statutes*, jade pendants decorated with dragon designs were part of the ceremonial dress (*lifū*) of an empress.⁴⁹

Another case, X₆, contains eight pairs of gold vessels.⁵⁰ These vessels carry inscriptions stating that they were products of the Imperial Jewelry Service (Yinzuoju). Most of them are dated to either 1601 or 1620. The excavation report ascribed this group of material to Wanli.⁵¹ This seems to be based on an assumption that gold was a material most appropriate for the emperor. Indeed, the Wanli emperor had 133 gold objects inside his coffin. However, all the objects in X₆ have plain surfaces, unlike the many elaborately decorated pieces found buried with the emperor. Furthermore, two vessels from X₆ were scientifically analyzed and their gold content was found to be relatively low, compared to gold objects in Wanli's coffin that tend to reach 80 percent purity.⁵² For these reasons, it seems more likely that X₆ was intended for Xiaoduan and Xiaojing.

The burial goods for Xiaoduan and Xiaojing placed on the raised platform put them on par with each other in terms of the hierarchy of imperial accoutrements. Interestingly, no distinction seems to have been made between Xiaoduan as an empress and Xiaojing as an empress dowager. They were both conceptualized as primary consorts of the emperor. Yet the location of X₆, X₇ and X₁₇ near Xiaojing's coffin rather than near Xiaoduan's or in a middle point between the two coffins, suggest that maybe there was greater concern with helping to

raise and cement Xiaojing's position as an empress in the afterlife.

AN EMPEROR'S CROWN AND A *DI*-PHEASANT ROBE

Having established the additional burial goods that were given to Empress Xiaojing when her body was transferred to the Ding Mausoleum, what was she originally buried with? Apart from the objects inside her coffin, which will be discussed later, the excavation report suggests that three containers on the raised platform next to her coffin (X11, X13 and X16) were burial goods that were transferred from the Eastern Well.⁵³ This is based on the content of the cases and their quality. Unfortunately, the wooden cases themselves have largely decayed and cannot be compared except by their recorded dimensions. X13 and X16 are the only two square containers (measuring 64 x 64 cm) out of all the cases in the burial, which could suggest that they were prepared separately from the rest of the containers.⁵⁴

X11 contains a tin commemorative document that has oxidized and is in fragments, and the text on it is indecipherable. However, it also contains three ceremonial objects made of white jade of different geometric shapes kept in a round lacquer box.⁵⁵ Their function is unclear but similar examples have been found in the tombs of other Ming imperial concubines, which correspond with the original burial status of Xiaojing as an imperial concubine.⁵⁶ As part of her funerary arrangements, Xiaojing's commemorative document as an imperial concubine of the first rank would have come with a seal bearing her posthumous title, similar to those for empresses discussed earlier. X10 contains a wooden seal that is badly decayed and only the knob remains.⁵⁷ Although the report ascribes it to Xiaoduan, it is more likely that this seal belonged to Xiaojing since her seal as an imperial concubine is not included elsewhere among the burial goods.⁵⁸

X13 and X16 are less straightforward. X13 contains a group of jade objects, including a belt, pendant and tablet, which, according to the excavation report, are coarser and of poorer quality than other examples in the mausoleum.⁵⁹ While these types of objects could be part of the accoutrements of an imperial concubine or an empress, their quality suggests that they were intended for Xiaojing when she was an imperial concubine. It is thus surprising to learn that these jade objects were found together with an emperor's formal ceremonial headdress (*mianguan*) that have tassels hanging from the front and back.⁶⁰ Only the gold, jade, and stone parts of the headdress have survived. In total,

274 stone beads of different colors were recovered in X₁₃. This roughly corresponds to the design expected of an emperor's ceremonial headdress that has 12 threads hanging from the front and back respectively, each carrying 12 beads.⁶¹ The headdress from X₁₃ has since been re-constructed and can be compared to another ceremonial headdress of the same type found inside Wanli's coffin, also reconstructed.

The unexpected presence of this headdress in X₁₃ has so far not been addressed. One explanation is that X₁₃ was not meant for Xiaojing, but was actually a part of Wanli's burial goods and was misplaced by accident. However, the jade objects in X₁₃ do not match the jade pieces found in Wanli's coffin that are decorated and of higher quality. Furthermore, Wanli already has one of these headdresses in his coffin and there is no clear reason why he would need to be buried with a duplicate. Another possibility is that the headdress in X₁₃ was an addition to Xiaojing's burial goods from the Taichang emperor, or perhaps the Tianqi emperor, when she was transferred to the Ding Mausoleum. The combination of the emperor's ceremonial headdress with jade objects that should be from Xiaojing's accoutrements as an imperial concubine alludes to her role as mother of the emperor. However, there is no known ceremonial basis for this inclusion, and it can be considered exceptional.

If X₁₃ was originally buried with Xiaojing in the Eastern Well, as the excavation report suggests, then it presents an even more intriguing scenario. Given Wanli's attitude towards Xiaojing, it is unlikely that he would have bestowed his own ceremonial headdress upon her, and the inclusion could only have been made without his consent or knowledge. Eunuchs of the inner court who managed the emperor's regalia would need to have been involved. Could this have been arranged through the Ministry of Rites, perhaps with the support of Empress Dowager Li, who was sympathetic to Xiaojing's circumstances? Was this an inclusion in Xiaojing's burial near the Eastern Well that was intended to look forward to her elevation to the position of empress dowager and eventual re-burial into the Ding Mausoleum? These suggestions are only speculative at best; yet there is another unusual inclusion among Xiaojing's burial goods in X₁₆ that adds to the possibility that exceptional decisions were made for her entombment.

X₁₆ contains 11 pairs of female shoes with elevated heels as well as three yellow robes in child sizes.⁶² Two of the garments, made of translucent gauze (*luo*) and woven silk (*zhusi*), have decayed. The third garment is made of *sha*, another type of loosely woven fabric, and is painted in silver-grey with a repeated pheasant motif interspersed with

dotted roundel decorations. Measuring 33 cm in height and 55 cm across including the sleeves, this garment is believed to have been made for Xiaojing's daughter who passed away in infancy.⁶³ On this basis, X16 has been attributed to Xiaojing. The problem with this conclusion, however, is that the decoration on the garment is not meant for a princess. The *Statutes* record that the dress for princesses is the same as for the consort of an imperial prince (*qinwang*).⁶⁴ The ceremonial robe is meant to be embroidered on the front and back with phoenix-and-cloud motifs, and should not be in yellow.⁶⁵ Instead, this distinctive design of *di*-pheasants with dotted roundels is clearly recorded in the *Statutes* as the design reserved for the ceremonial robe of an empress, which can be made using *sha*, *luo*, and *zhusi* – the three types of fabrics found in X16. The textual description in the *Statutes* makes clear reference to the dotted roundel design (*xiao lunhua*), which is not found in the descriptions for other garments. The design of this robe is illustrated in the *Statutes*, and apart from the borders and front fold, it is very similar in decoration to the garment in X16.⁶⁶ Further depictions of this type of robe are found in the album portraits of the Ming empresses, noted earlier. Thus, the garment in X16 is not a garment suitable for a princess. Perhaps this garment was meant for Xiaoduan, since she was made empress at the young of age 13 years old. Yet the garment may still be too small for a 13-year-old girl. Moreover, the decoration on it is painted rather than embroidered, which raises the question of whether it could have been worn in ritual or whether it was included in the burial goods for symbolic purposes. Could it be related to the emperor's headdress that was found in X13, since both of these could function to connect Xiaojing to her eventual status as empress dowager? These questions may not be answerable based on existing information, but evidently the burial goods in the Ding Mausoleum do not neatly follow guidelines for dress and accoutrements found in the *Statutes*. Exceptions were made, and the problematic status of Xiaojing during her life offer one possible explanation for their inclusion.

BURIAL GOODS INSIDE THE EMPRESSES' COFFINS

Apart from the cases of burial goods located on the raised platform, many objects in the Ding Mausoleum were found inside the coffins. When Empress Xiaojing was re-buried, her entire coffin was moved. This is evident in the difference in its quality compared to the coffins of Empress Xiaoduan and the Wanli emperor. Empress Xiaojing's coffin was made of unlacquered pine wood that had collapsed by the time it was excavated in the mid-20th century, whereas Xiaoduan's and Wanli's

coffins were lacquered and made of more durable *nanmu*, which, as noted in Sally Church's chapter, was also favored in shipbuilding.⁶⁷ Layers of textiles filled the coffins; some pieces were worn on the body of the deceased, while most were on top, below and around the deceased.⁶⁸ Vessels and other objects were placed among the textiles.

The burial goods inside the coffins also reveal the difference in status between Empresses Xiaoduan and Xiaojing in material terms. To begin with, Xiaoduan was buried in a garment and skirt embroidered with the dragon motif, a symbol of imperial authority that is not found on the clothing that Xiaojing wears on her body.⁶⁹ The excavation report also points out a significant difference in the number of gold objects found in Xiaoduan's coffin (130) compared to Xiaojing's (6).⁷⁰ Xiaojing's six gold objects consist of two dishes, a basin, a cupstand, a wine ewer, and a pair of gold covered chopsticks. All of these are undecorated, except for the cupstand that has raised designs of dragons. Actually, Xiaoduan did not have many more gold vessels in her coffin. She was buried with three gold boxes, two dishes, one basin, and a pair of gold pillow ends. A few more of them are decorated: One of the dishes and an octagonal box have dragon motifs, while the pillow ends are inlaid with gemstones and are comparable to the pair in Wanli's coffin.⁷¹ Instead, the disparity in the quantity of gold comes from a substantial gap in 'disposable income': Xiaoduan is buried with 22 gold ingots and 100 gold coins, none of which were included in Xiaojing's tomb.⁷² The gold coins are inscribed with the auspicious text 'eliminate disasters and extend long-life' (*xiaozai yanshou*), so they were made for burial, but they take the form of money. Xiaoduan also has more silver ingots (30, same as Wanli) compared to Xiaojing (5).⁷³ By comparison, Xiaojing has many more copper-alloy Wanli *tongbao* coins (491 coins) compared to Xiaoduan (95 coins).⁷⁴

Moreover, Xiaoduan is not buried with any silver vessels, which is less valuable than gold, whereas Xiaojing's coffin contains a total of 10 examples.⁷⁵ Several of these, including a ewer, a dish and a basin, are dated to the cyclical year *renwu*, equivalent to 1582. This date suggests Xiaojing received these objects in connection to her first pregnancy when she was elevated to the position of an imperial concubine of the second rank. The center of the dated dish depicts two circling birds, each with different tail feathers.⁷⁶ These probably represent the phoenix (*feng*) and the similar *luan* bird, which is the combination of birds specified for the routine court dress of imperial concubines of the second rank (*fei*) in the *Statutes*. The inclusion of both gold and silver vessels in Xiaojing's coffin corresponds with her change in status over time from imperial concubine of the second to the first rank. Judging from the burial goods inside the coffins, there is noticeable difference between an imperial

concubine of the first rank (Xiaojing) compared to an empress (Xiaoduan) in terms of material status. Interestingly, this difference is primarily manifested in objects with monetary form rather than functional vessels.

Whether this difference is a part of more generalized practice or is specific to the Ding Mausoleum is not known. Some writers, including the excavation report, have interpreted the disparity in gold items between Xiaoduan and Xiaojing as evidence of the unjust treatment of Xiaojing in both life and death.⁷⁷ While this may be the case, Xiaojing's burial was notably enhanced by the inclusion of a significant number of jewelry pieces that were not counted among the gold items listed in the excavation report and instead were treated as a separate category. In total, there were 94 pieces of jewelry in Xiaojing's coffin, including 41 gold *zan* hairpins (single pronged), while others include silver pieces gilded with gold.⁷⁸ The excavation report divides Xiaojing's jewelry into two sets based on their location in the coffin.⁷⁹ The first set consists of 47 pieces, a few of which were pinned onto Xiaojing's hair bun, some were on a cap behind her head while others were scattered around her head.⁸⁰ A second group also of 47 pieces was located to the side of the coffin. Many of these are inlaid with precious gems.⁸¹ In comparison, Xiaoduan was buried with 49 pieces of jewelry, 38 of which are gold *zan* hairpins, most of which were pinned onto a cap that she wears, which created a single impressive headpiece.⁸²

The excavation report speculates that Xiaojing's second group of 47 hair ornaments were added to her coffin when the tomb was transferred to the Ding Mausoleum. The reasoning behind this is not clear, but it may be because of an expectation that Xiaojing was buried in reduced circumstances near the Eastern Well. It seems doubtful that Xiaojing's coffin would be opened and disturbed after a burial of eight years. Moreover, there are three caps in her coffin for securing hairpins, one of which is found within the layers of textiles in the coffin, which may suggest that more jewelry items were intended for her burial.⁸³ In any case, the group of jewelry was included in Xiaojing's burial in order to enhance it. They would either have been given to her when she was alive or after her death as burial goods. Many of these pieces of jewelry were made with a gold filigree technique and show an interest in three-dimensional form, which might suggest that they came from a single source.⁸⁴ It is highly unlikely that the jewelry came from the Wanli emperor, given the attitude he demonstrated towards Xiaojing. It would need to have come from a source with access to jewelry meant for imperial women. Could they have come from Empress Dowager Li? She was still alive at the time of Xiaojing's first burial and had shown support for her as well as for her son Zhu Changluo as the rightful

crown prince throughout her life. A number of the hairpins have Buddhist and Daoist motifs, discussed below, which are consistent with Empress Dowager Li's well-documented religious interests.⁸⁵ While the practice of gift giving between women is not frequently recorded in Chinese sources, there is some evidence of its existence in a Ming courtly context.⁸⁶ One pertinent example cited by Craig Clunas is the burial of Madame Feng, a consort of Prince Kang of Ning (Ning Kangwang), who died in Jiangxi province in 1516 during the Zhengde reign (1506–21).⁸⁷ Her tomb epitaph records that a grand empress dowager, an empress dowager, an empress as well as a princess all sent offerings to her burial.⁸⁸ It is thus not beyond the realm of possibility that Empress Dowager Li could have been involved in Xiaojing's burial to some degree and perhaps offered jewelry for burial in sympathy for her circumstances.

FERTILITY AND TRANSCENDENCE

Many of the objects discussed so far served to establish and consolidate in material terms the courtly identities of Xiaoduan and Xiaojing as empresses, and also as an imperial concubine for the latter. For Xiaojing, the basis of her position at the imperial court was motherhood, or more specifically her ability to produce a son. This aspect of her identity was emphasized in her burial. Arguably the most well-known garment from the Ding Mausoleum belongs to Xiaojing – it is a red lined-jacket with a square neckband and elaborately embroidered gold dragons, flowers, and scenes of children at play. A replica of the jacket made after it was excavated has been on display at the museum of the Ding Mausoleum in order to showcase its impressive design and craftsmanship.⁸⁹ In total, Xiaojing is buried with three of these jackets, all emphasizing having sons and fecundity in connection with imperial authority symbolized by the gold dragons.⁹⁰ Empress Xiaoduan was also buried with clothing that carry patterns symbolizing fecundity, such as gourds or children with vines, but the extant examples from her coffin are woven and none are as elaborate as Xiaojing's embroidered jackets. Notably, Xiaojing's fertility is further emphasized by the inclusion of a triangular sanitary cloth for menstruation that she wears on her body in burial.⁹¹ This is an uncommon but not unheard-of inclusion in the burial of women in China.⁹² Xiaojing passed away at the age of 46. As she was by then no longer a young woman, the presence of her menstrual cloth in her burial makes a significant statement about her continued fertility and its centrality to her identity in the imperial household.

For Xiaoduan, the wish for a long life was apparently an important

preoccupation. The character *shou* for ‘longevity’ and *wan* for ‘ten thousand’, together with symbolic motifs such as peaches and cranes, appear on many of the textiles and jewelry that she was buried with. For instance, in the center of her cap is a large hairpin with the character for longevity made of jade, which is the focal point of her elaborate arrangement of ornaments.⁹³ Xiaoduan most likely owned these objects expressing the wish for longevity during her lifetime. Perhaps they were gifts that she received for her birthday celebrations, which were then included in her burial. Below this central hairpin is a single row of five hairpins each with the character for ‘Buddha’ (*fo*) made of jade. This should be a reference to the five Dhyani (meditation) Buddhas that correspond to the five directions and are derived from Tibetan Buddhism.

Buddhist elements and the desire to transcend the physical realm can be observed in different aspects of the burial at the Ding Mausoleum. Scholars have noted that the corpse of the Wanli emperor is arranged in the position of *parinirvāṇa* of the Śākyamuni Buddha, which is well represented in Buddhist art.⁹⁴ This is the position where the figure lies down on his right side, his legs stretched out, his left-hand rests on his left thigh, and his right hand supports his head. This was also a posture that late Ming sources recommended as a form of ‘auspicious sleep’ that could help the practitioner transform his body into the body of a Buddha.⁹⁵ For Wanli, this posture that equated him with the Buddha would have significance as an expression of his sacred rulership.

Xiaoduan’s body was arranged on her back, while Xiaojing’s was arranged in a similar fashion to Wanli but with her knees bent and it is unclear whether it can be interpreted as the position of ‘auspicious sleep’.⁹⁶ The wish for transcendence is more clearly observable in other aspects. Xiaojing’s body was found covered by a sheet of fabric that had a Buddhist sutra written on it in red.⁹⁷ Only a few words remain legible: ‘Namo Ami(tābha)’ across the centre and ‘Huayan’ written vertically along the side. ‘Namo Amitābha’ is a mantra for repeated recitation that invokes the Amitābha Buddha, which can help the devotee reach their own Buddhahood. Huayan refers to the ‘Flower Garland Sutra’ (*Huayan jing*) that expresses the ultimate reality of an enlightened being. No other extant example of this type of covering for the deceased from the Ming dynasty and before is known. During the Qing dynasty, members of the Manchu imperial family were buried with sutra sheets made of woven textile bearing Tantric spells that would protect the deceased in the afterlife.⁹⁸ Whether Xiaojing’s covering is related to this later practice will require further research.

In addition, Buddhist motifs can be found among the empresses’ many

hairpins. Xiaoduan has a hairpin on her cap with a bust figure of the Buddha carved from red-colored jade set against an areola made of white jade and above a lotus pedestal inlaid with gems.⁹⁹ Several more examples are found around Xiaojing in her coffin, including one hairpin with a golden Buddha figure against a flaming areola, one hairpin with a white jade Buddha shown with an areola, the eight Buddhist treasures and Sanskrit text, as well as two gilt silver hairpins with the figure of the Bodhisattva Guanyin also with Sanskrit text.¹⁰⁰ There are examples of Daoist motifs as well, such as one hairpin with a figure made of gold filigree depicting a woman that is most likely the Queen Mother of the West (Xiwangmu).

During the late Ming dynasty, Buddhism reached a high point in Ming court culture under the energetic patronage of Empress Dowager Li that extended well beyond the capital. Based on the burial goods and their arrangements in the Ding Mausoleum, it is possible to observe that all three tomb occupants shared her interest in Buddhism. As speculated above, Xiaojing's jewelry could have come from Empress Dowager Li. In particular, two hairpins with the figure of Guanyin might have close connections to the empress dowager. They depict Guanyin carrying a fish basket, which refers to the story of the bodhisattva disguising herself as an ordinary woman in the marketplace. Guanyin with a fish basket was a popular representation of the bodhisattva during the late Ming dynasty.¹⁰¹ It was also an image that Empress Dowager Li was known to have identified with and disseminated in the form of ink rubbings.¹⁰²

In addition, the jewelry with Buddhist motifs in the Ding Mausoleum can be considered in relation to a broader religious phenomenon when women devotees of Buddhism were buried with hairstyles that imitated the iconography of Guanyin.¹⁰³ Several tombs have been excavated where women were found with hairpins showing the figure of the Amitābha Buddha, which is conventionally depicted in the center of Guanyin's headdress as a distinguishing feature of the bodhisattva.¹⁰⁴ According to Li Yuhong, 'dressing up as Guanyin' connected the worshipped and the worshipper in a new way during the mid-Ming to the Qing dynasties.¹⁰⁵ In the mortuary context, Li suggests that this could be interpreted as 'preparing the deceased body to transcend to the Pure Land.'¹⁰⁶

CONCLUSION

The burial goods of Empresses Xiaoduan and Xiaojing located around their coffins in the Ding Mausoleum reveal efforts to provide both women with the same types of accoutrements that were markers of their

status as empresses, such as headdresses, jade ornaments, and gold vessels. While it is not known whether these items would be displayed to an audience before burial, their location in cases outside of the coffins might have made them more visible. When we compare the objects inside the coffins, this shows a hierarchical difference in treatment between Xiaoduan's burial as an empress and Xiaojing's as an imperial concubine – the status she was initially buried with. A number of items that raise questions for interpretation most likely come from Xiaojing's original burial. These items seem to echo her problematic status at court throughout her life and in death when she was caught in the politics of succession and the conflicts between Wanli, his ministers, and Empress Dowager Li.

Empress Xiaojing was not the first instance during the Ming dynasty when an imperial woman changed status in death and whose burial was transferred into the imperial mausoleum. This situation took place under the Hongzhi reign (r. 1488–1505), and again when the Jiajing emperor (r. 1522–66) was buried with three empresses, two of whom had to be moved from their original burial site.¹⁰⁷ Problems with the proper burial of empresses were perhaps unanticipated by the Ming founder the Hongwu emperor (r. 1368–98) when he established the custom of the co-burial of emperor and empress in the same mausoleum.¹⁰⁸ The increasing number of examples where the crown prince was not born of the empress challenged this neat arrangement. The creation of the position of *Huang guifei* or imperial concubine of the first rank under the Jingtai emperor (r. 1450–56) for his favorite Consort Tang (d. 1457), created further ambiguities in the hierarchy of the inner court for which sumptuary laws in the *Statutes* did not apparently clarify.¹⁰⁹

The burial of imperial women – who had the right to be buried with the emperor and how – was a deeply political and at times emotional issue. During instances when succession was challenged, women like Xiaojing who were implicated could become the focal point of contest between different power factions at court in both life and death. This can find expression in material form such as in the spaces in which they lived, the way that they dressed, the objects that they used and how they were finally buried.

NOTES

- 1 Excavation of the Ding Mausoleum was intended to be a test case in preparation for the excavation of the Chang Mausoleum of the Yongle emperor and Empress Xu, which ultimately never took place. See Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo et al., *Dingling*, henceforth *DL* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1990),

vol. 1, 1.

- 2 Yang Shi and Yue Nan, *Fengxue Dingling – Cong Wanli dao Wenge dixia xuangong dongkai zhi mi* (Beijing: Xin shijie chubanshe, 1997), 341–2.
- 3 *DL*. One of the volumes provided images, including low-resolution black-and-white photographs of the scenes of excavation.
- 4 There is also a color film showing some scenes of the excavation.
- 5 Some scholars have discussed the Ding Mausoleum in connection to Ming royal tombs. See for instance, Liu Yi, *Mingdai diwang lingmu zhidu yanjiu* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2006); Yang Xiaoneng, “Ming Art and Culture from an Archaeological Perspective – Part 2: The Imperial Mausoleum and Elite Burial Practices,” *Orientalisms* (Sept. 2006), 69–78; Zhang Caijuan, “Mingdai feipin mu chutu liyi yong yu yu guanfu zhidu,” *Zhongguo lishi wenwu* [Journal of National Museum of Chinese History], no. 1 (2007).
- 6 On Xiaoduan’s biography, see Zhang Tingyu, ed., *Ming shi*, henceforth *MS* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), *juan* 114, 3536.
- 7 *MS* 114, 3536.
- 8 For Xiaojing’s biography see *MS* 114, 3536–7; Liu Jingyi, “Ming Shenzong Chunyi huang guifei Wang shi kuangzhi kao,” in Beijing shi shehui kexueyuan lishisuo, ed., vol. 1, 255–67. *Beijing shi yanjiu* (Beijing: Beijing yanshan chubanshe, 1986).
- 9 The construction process is summarised in *DL* vol. 1, 338–41.
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 On the design of the Mausoleum, see *DL* vol. 1, 9–21.
- 12 Liu Yi, *Mingdai diwang lingmu zhidu yanjiu*, 398.
- 13 Yang and Yue, *Fengxue Dingling*, 261.
- 14 Liu Yi, *Mingdai diwang lingmu zhidu yanjiu*, 129.
- 15 Liu Yi, *Mingdai diwang lingmu zhidu yanjiu*, 121. At one point, the Wanli emperor wanted to grant another one of his consorts the right to be buried in the right chamber of the Ding Mausoleum, but officials objected to this arrangement because of her lower rank.
- 16 See diagram in *DL* vol. 1, 27.
- 17 The contents of the containers are listed in *DL* vol. 1, 298, appendix table 25.
- 18 These three containers are given in the textual description, but not marked on the diagram in the report.
- 19 *MS* 114, 3536.
- 20 One source says she looked after the two sons of imperial concubine Li after Li passed away. See Liu Ruoyu, *Zhuozhong zhi* (c. 1638; repr. Beijing: Beijing guji chubanshe, 1994), *juan* 22, 191.
- 21 The *Ming shilu* (Veritable Records of the Ming) will be referred to as *MSL*. See responses upon Xiaoduan’s death in *MSL* Shenzong, *juan* 593 and in Nan Bingwen and Wu Yanling, *Ji jiao Wanli qiju zhu* (Tianjin: Tianjin guji chubanshe, 2010), vol. 6, 3755–60.
- 22 *MS* 114, 3536–7.
- 23 *Guoben* has also been translated as ‘trunk of the state’. This controversy is extensively covered in publications about the Wanli reign, such as Ray Huang, 1587, *A Year of No Significance: The Ming Dynasty in Decline* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981).

- 24 MS 114, 3537; Liu Jingyi, “Ming Shenzong Chunyi huang guifei Wang shi kuangzhi kao,” 258–9.
- 25 Liu Jingyi, “Ming Shenzong Chunyi huang guifei Wang shi kuangzhi kao,” 257–8. See also MSL Shenzong, *juan* 219.1b. For the location of this palace in the Ming Forbidden City, see Meng Fanren, *Mingdai gongting jianzhu shi* (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2011), 294.
- 26 Liu Jingyi, “Ming Shenzong Chunyi huang guifei Wang shi kuangzhi kao,” 258.
- 27 Liu Jingyi, “Ming Shenzong Chunyi huang guifei Wang shi kuangzhi kao,” 260; L. Carrington Goodrich (ed.), *Dictionary of Ming Biography, 1368–1644*, henceforth DMB (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 209.
- 28 MS 114, 3537.
- 29 MS 114, 3537; Liu Jingyi, “Ming Shenzong Chunyi huang guifei Wang shi kuangzhi kao,” 259–60.
- 30 MSL Shenzong, *juan* 487.8b–9a.
- 31 On this issue, see different case studies in Joseph McDermott, *State and court ritual in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
- 32 Liu Jingyi, “Ming Shenzong Chunyi huang guifei Wang shi kuangzhi kao,” 261–2.
- 33 Liu Jingyi, “Ming Shenzong Chunyi huang guifei Wang shi kuangzhi kao,” 261–2.
- 34 MSL Guangzong, *juan* 7.7b–8a. Also see DMB, 211.
- 35 Liu Jingyi, “Ming Shenzong Chunyi huang guifei Wang shi kuangzhi kao,” 263.
- 36 Liu Jingyi, “Ming Shenzong Chunyi huang guifei Wang shi kuangzhi kao,” 260.
- 37 DL vol. 1, p. 42.
- 38 DL vol. 1, appendix table 36.4.
- 39 DL vol. 1, 222–31.
- 40 Li Dongyang and Shen Mingxing, *Da Ming hui dian*, henceforth DMHD (1587; repr. Taipei: Donguan shubao she, 1963), *juan* 60.32a–39b.
- 41 DMHD 60.37b.
- 42 DMHD 60.32a.
- 43 These loose gems and pearls may have dropped from the headdress – the documentation is not clear.
- 44 See Luk Yu-ping, “The Empress’ Dragon Crown: Establishing Imperial Authority in the Early Ming,” in *Ming China: Courts and Contacts, 1400–1450*, ed. Craig Clunas, Jessica Harrison-Hall and Luk Yu-ping (London: British Museum Press, 2016), 68–76.
- 45 DL vol. 1, 206. See also Xu Wen Yao, “Mingdai de fengguan daodi shenme yang,” *Zijincheng* 2 (2013), 62–85; Luk, “The Empress’ Dragon Crown.”
- 46 See Xu Wen Yao. DL vol. 1, 206 suggests they were for ceremonial use.
- 47 According to the *Statutes*, both headdresses should have tassels (*zhujie*). DMHD 60.32b, 37b. There is variation in how these headdresses are depicted in the album of empress’ portraits in the National Palace Museum, Taipei.
- 48 DL vol. 1, appendix table 15 and 36.4, 151–63.
- 49 Zhang Caijuan, “Mingdai feipin mu chutu liyi yong yu yu guanfu zhidu,” 43. There are, however, three single jade items (a tablet, a pendant-drop and an octagonal ornament) in this case that remain unexplained.
- 50 DL vol. 1, appendix table 36.4.

- 51 *DL* vol. 1, appendix table 25.
- 52 *DL* vol. 1, appendix table 15.
- 53 *DL* vol. 1, 42.
- 54 X17 has a length of 64 cm but no width is given. See *DL* vol. 1, appendix table 25.
- 55 *DL* vol. 1, 189.
- 56 *Ibid.*
- 57 *DL* vol. 1, 229.
- 58 Liu Yi, *Mingdai diwang lingmu zhidu yanjiu*, 437.
- 59 *DL* vol. 1, 207–10; Zhang Caijuan, “Mingdai feipin mu chutu liyi yong yu yu guanfu zhidu,” 43.
- 60 *DL* vol. 1, 203.
- 61 *DMHD* 60.2a.
- 62 *DL* vol. 1, 120.
- 63 Princess Yunmeng (1584–87), Wanli’s fourth daughter; see *MSL* Shenzong, *juan* 151.2a.
- 64 *DMHD* 60.62a.
- 65 *DMHD* 60.61a.
- 66 See illustration in *DMHD* 60.36a.
- 67 *DL* vol. 1, 23. Unfortunately, these coffins were discarded and thrown off a cliff after replicas of them were made. See Yang and Yue, *Fengxue Dingling*, 323.
- 68 It is difficult to compare the textiles found in Xiaoduan’s and Xiaojing’s coffin as a whole since only a portion has been reproduced. Xiaoduan and Xiaojing were buried with similar quantities of textiles. See *DL* vol. 1, 43. Also the inventory lists give the impression that there are comparable types of extant textiles, mostly with dragon designs, floral, seasonal or auspicious motifs. See appendix table 1 and 7. There is some evidence that the quality of textiles found in Xiaojing’s coffin varied widely. One garment is described as having been re-used and mended (numbered J55:9), and this is interpreted as indicative of her difficult life. See *DL* vol. 1, 122.
- 69 *DL* vol. 1, 25.
- 70 *DL* vol. 1, 151.
- 71 *DL* vol. 2, pl. 75, 79.
- 72 *DL* vol. 1, 163–5.
- 73 *DL* vol. 1, 169–75.
- 74 *DL* vol. 1, 231–3.
- 75 *DL* vol. 1, 166.
- 76 *DL* vol. 1, 167, fig. 268.
- 77 See Liu Jingyi, “Ming Shenzong Chunyi huang guifei Wang shi kuangzhi kao,” 263–5. This is also the view expressed throughout the *DL*, see for instance, vol. 1, 112.
- 78 *DL* vol. 1, 197–201.
- 79 *DL* vol. 1, appendix tables 31 and 32.
- 80 *DL* vol. 1, 197–8. It is difficult to match this description with diagram 56 and table 31.
- 81 The arrangement of jewelry for Xiaojing is not entirely clear from the excavation

report. There is a diagram in which the loose hair accessories look evenly spread out around Xiaojing's head. However, it is not possible to identify this in the low-resolution black-and-white photograph of Xiaojing's coffin when it was excavated.

- 82 *DL* vol. 1, 196–7.
- 83 *DL* vol. 1, appendix table 36 (3).
- 84 For an attempt to compare the empresses' excavated jewelry see Wang Limei, "Wanli huangdi liang wei huanghou fazan de chabie," *Zijincheng* 8 (2007), 198–203.
- 85 Buddhist elements in the empresses' jewelry are discussed in Zhang Wen, "Ming Dingling chutu jinzhan zhuangshi zhong de fojiao yinsu," *Dongfang shoucang* 2 (2014), 22–25.
- 86 Craig Clunas, *Screen of Kings: Royal Art and Power in Ming China* (London: Reaktion, 2013), 155–8.
- 87 Clunas, *Screen of Kings*, 157.
- 88 Unfortunately the tomb has been robbed. Guo Yuanwei, "Nanchang Ming Ning Kangwang cifei Feng shi mu," *Kaogu* 4 (1964), 213–4.
- 89 Reproduced in *DL* vol. 2, no. 46.
- 90 *DL* vol. 1, 136–40.
- 91 *DL* vol. 1, 124.
- 92 An example of a used menstrual cloth was found in a Southern Song tomb in Fuzhou. See Fuzhou sheng bowuguan, "Fuzhou shi beijiao Nan Song mu qingli jianbao," *Wenwu* 7 (1977), 1–77.
- 93 *DL* vol. 1, 25, fig. 31.
- 94 He Xiaorong, *Mingdai Beijing fojiao siyuan xiujuan yanjiu* (Tianjin: Nankai daxue chuabanshe, 2007), vol. 1, 298.
- 95 Kuroda Institute, Bryan J. Cuevas, and Jacqueline Ilyse Stone, *The Buddhist Dead: Practices, Discourses, Representations* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2007), 195.
- 96 Liu Yi, *Mingdai diwang lingmu zhidu yanjiu*, 395. *DL* vol. 1, 25, 42, fig. 30, 32–5.
- 97 *DL* vol. 1, 25, 124.
- 98 Zhang Fengrong and Yang Huilan, "Minghuang zhijin tuoluo jingbei," *Zijincheng* 1 (1992), 27–8.
- 99 *DL* vol. 1, 196, but fig. 31 does not show exact location of number D112:41.
- 100 Zhang Wen, "Ming Dingling chutu jinzhan zhuangshi zhong de fojiao yinsu," 22–25.
- 101 On Guanyin with a fish basket, see Chün-fang Yü, "The Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteshvara," in Marsha Weidner, ed., *Latter Days of the Law: Images of Chinese Buddhism 850–1850* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii, 1994), 166–9.
- 102 Luk, "The Empress' Dragon Crown."
- 103 Li Yuhong, "Gendered Materialization: An Investigation of Women's Artistic and Literary Reproductions of Guanyin in Late Imperial China," (PhD diss. The University of Chicago, 2011), p. 219, citing early sixteenth-century burial of the Wang Luo family where two women were buried with decoration in connection with Guanyin.

- 104 Cited in Li Yuhong, “Gendered Materialization,” 218, fn 11.
- 105 Li Yuhong, “Gendered Materialization,” 222.
- 106 Li Yuhong, “Gendered Materialization,” 222.
- 107 The Hongzhi emperor moved his biological mother’s coffin to the Mou Mausoleum so she could be buried with the Chenghua emperor. The Jiajing emperor was initially buried with his favorite concubine, Xiaolie (née Wan). Subsequently, Xiaoke (d. 1554; née Du), mother of the Longqing emperor, and Xiaojie (née Chen) who was Jiajing’s first empress were transferred to the site.
- 108 Zhao Zhongnan et al., *Mingdai gongting dianzhi shi* [A history of Ming court decrees and regulations] (Beijing: Forbidden City Press, 2010), 525.
- 109 According to Shen Defu, *Wanli yehuo bian* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959, repr. 1997), *juan* 3, vol. 1, 77, the title of *Huang guifei* was established under the Xuande emperor. In fact, Xuande bestowed a gold seal to his favourite Consort Sun (later empress), which exceeded protocol at the time, but the title of *Huang guifei* was not used until the Jingtai period. *MSL Yingzong*, *juan* 269.4a.

CHAPTER 19

FROM PEASANT REBEL TO MING LOYALIST

The career of Li Dingguo



Kenneth M. Swope

The Ming-Qing dynastic transition in the seventeenth century was one of the most tumultuous in all of China's long history and produced a great number of heroes on both sides. One of the most unlikely was the peasant rebel general Li Dingguo (c. 1620–62).¹ Raised from childhood by the notorious Ming peasant rebel Zhang Xianzhong (1606–47),² Li first helped topple the Ming dynasty then ironically became its most ardent military supporter and leading commander against the Manchu invaders. As a military leader, Li perfected the mobile warfare that made the late Ming peasant rebels so dangerous, striking suddenly and without warning and laying ambushes with flair and daring. He also adapted his tactics to China's rugged southwest, making adept use of terrain and incorporating elephant cavalry into his

armies for shock power. Over the course of his career he killed several prominent Qing generals and nearly reversed the tide of Ming defeat against all odds. Modern Chinese celebrate him for his patriotism and uniting with minority peoples against the hated Manchu invaders, making him a symbol of the union of China's ethnic groups against outsiders. His contemporaries lauded him as "a little Zhuge Liang," in reference to the famed military commander of China's Three Kingdoms Period (220–280).³ This chapter will examine Li's generalship at both the tactical and strategic levels and consider him within the broader context of his times tracing how he was transformed from a notorious peasant rebel to an ardent Ming loyalist.

ASSESSMENTS OF LI

Given his rustic background and harsh upbringing, one of the most interesting dimensions of Li's career is his broad-based appeal to members of vastly different social classes and educational backgrounds. From his own lifetime Li's virtues and exploits were extolled by fellow peasant rebels, enemies and rivals, imperial officials, monarchs and neutral observers. This seems to be in part because he managed to embody so many idealized virtues for different constituencies. For example, both Ming loyalists and modern nationalists noted Li's desire "to erase the shame of being called a bandit" and his enthusiasm in working with various groups, most notably minority peoples from China's southwest, to doggedly resist the despised Manchu invaders.⁴ Likewise, modern communist historians have praised Li's solidarity with the common people and devotion to their interests, though some have questioned his willingness to accept titles of nobility from the Ming claimant, Yongli (r. 1647–61) as betraying the populist cause.⁵ For their part, Ming and Qing literati and loyalists from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries, not to mention certain members of the Qing court, praised Li's steadfast devotion to the Ming cause and refusal to submit to the Qing (he died of illness in the Burmese wilderness) in contrast to associates of Li who brokered deals with the Qing. Li's literacy and supposed familiarity with high traditions and classical allusions certainly contributed to his acceptance by such groups, even if the references to his literary accomplishments and interests might be exaggerated in some of the sources. Such tropes also speak to the mingling of high and low culture in the Ming and to how individuals from different walks of life could fashion identities for themselves that would appeal to a wide array of potential audiences.

Military commanders, on the other hand, admired Li's battlefield

adaptability and praised the order and discipline of his troops. On multiple occasions he prevailed against daunting odds and even his defeats are often explained away as having been due to impossible situations. He made adept use of terrain and, drawing upon his long experience as a peasant rebel commander, emphasized speed and surprise in his attacks. But he also proved willing and able to adopt new strategies, tactics, and weapons, incorporating firearms extensively into his units. Indeed, contemporary Qing observers often lamented the superiority of firepower possessed by the Southern Ming armies, particularly those of Li Dingguo, and one of his later defeats was attributed in part to unfavorable winds blowing gunpowder smoke back into the faces of his units as the Qing attacked across a river. Taking a cue from the aboriginal groups he allied with in the southwest, Li and his fellow Southern Ming commanders made extensive use of elephant cavalry as well. These units were quite effective against Qing horses and also useful in siege operations, though their care and feeding could pose serious logistical difficulties. Furthermore Li's willingness to share hardships with his men and to treat them well is attested throughout the sources. Whereas his primary rival, Sun Kewang (d. 1660), was arrogant and eventually sought to make himself emperor in order to elevate himself above his erstwhile adoptive brothers, Li continually cultivated good relations with his fellow commanders and managed to co-opt nearly all of Sun's lieutenants to his own side by the time their final showdown occurred.⁶

BACKGROUND AND EARLY CAREER

Before continuing with details of Li's battlefield accomplishments, a few words on his earlier career and background are in order. The great peasant rebellions that helped to topple the Ming dynasty began in 1628 in northwest China and had their origins in a confluence of factors including widespread natural disasters including drought and famine, poor local administration, and cutbacks in governmental services, most notably the postal service, which employed a significant number of people in the region.⁷ Military maladministration and arrears in salary payments led to widespread desertion from the armed service and such men naturally turned to banditry. The notorious Zhang Xianzhong was among the earliest to raise the flag of rebellion in Shaanxi province and Li Dingguo, a native of Yulin, Shaanxi according to most accounts, allegedly followed Zhang from the tender age of ten, joining him in 1630.⁸

Zhang was impressed by Li's fierce demeanor, despite Li's young age

and therefore saw him as a suitable future lieutenant.⁹ It is said that Li was big and sturdy and that his eyes sparkled with intelligence. He liked to wash his face and hair and was spirited and self-reliant. Everybody in his village called him the “Little Prince of Firewood” because of his righteous bearing. In his spare time he allegedly spent time with literati, playing Chinese chess and reading books on military strategy and history. He treated even his inferiors with honor and he had the aspect of a Confucian scholar.¹⁰ His contemporary, the famous Confucian scholar and Ming loyalist Wang Fuzhi (1619–92), who may have known him personally, notes that Li was singular amongst the former bandits for his kindness.¹¹ Li was the second of Zhang’s four adopted sons, after the aforementioned Sun Kewang, and ahead of Liu Wenxiu and Ai Nengqi. Together the four would serve Zhang loyally for the next seventeen years and continue his legacy for some fifteen years after his death.¹²

Over the course of the next fifteen years Zhang rose to become one of the two leading figures in the rebel movement, surviving numerous close calls and surrendering on multiple occasions, only to return to his rebellious ways when the opportunity presented itself.¹³ Ming commanders tried a number of strategies to bring Zhang to heel but his craftiness, daring and their frequent backbiting incompetence allowed him to slip through their nets (literally and figuratively) time and again.¹⁴ Though evidence about Li Dingguo is somewhat scanty for these years, it is known that he was put into positions of increasing responsibility in Zhang’s forces and was valued for his literary and martial talents. He was said to be fond of elephant (Chinese) chess and read works of military strategy in his spare time.¹⁵ And though he was fierce and skilled in battle, he and his men did not partake in killing and rape when cities were taken, something that could not be said of his master, who was infamous for his cruelty.

Meanwhile the Ming peasant rebellions spread and the number of followers swelled to the hundreds of thousands. By 1643 both Zhang (in Huguang) and his rival Li Zicheng (in Shaanxi) had established rival regimes to challenge the Ming. Preoccupied in part by the ongoing challenge of the Manchus in the northeast, the Ming proved unable to fully eradicate these challenges. Li eventually managed to capture Beijing, prompting the last Ming Emperor Chongzhen (r. 1628–44) to commit suicide. Zhang, for his part, was forced from his base at Changsha and moved up the Yangzi River into Sichuan province in the spring of 1644, as Li’s forces were surrounding Beijing. By the summer of 1644 Zhang had seized the city of Chongqing and a few weeks later he occupied the provincial capital of Chengdu, making it the capital of his Great Western Kingdom. Unfortunately, over the next two and a half

years Zhang would embark upon a program of wholesale slaughter and wanton destruction that remains legendary, even if there is considerable potential for exaggeration on the part of extant biased sources.¹⁶



Southwest China in the Early Qing Era.

Map 19.1 Southwest China in the Early Qing

In any event, when Zhang finally met his (predicted) bloody demise at the hands of the Qing in northeastern Sichuan, his four adopted sons, all of whom had been invested as princes by their erstwhile father, inherited command of his remaining armies, projected at anywhere from 50,000–100,000 troops. After moving back to Chongqing and killing the Southern Ming commander there, they moved further south to avoid the oncoming Qing armies and better entrench themselves. More skirmishing with pro-Ming forces allowed them to penetrate into Guizhou and Guangxi provinces but their overall strategic position was tenuous. At this juncture, however, an unusual set of circumstances afforded them the opportunity to intervene in a dispute in Yunnan province. The successful prosecution of the ensuing conflict, most notably due to the military acumen of Li Dingguo, ushered in a new era for the former peasant rebels and set them on the road to political legitimization and respectability. In the words of some contemporaries, they now realized the opportunity to “erase the shame of banditry” and make positive names for themselves in the historical record.

Since the dynasty's inception in the fourteenth century the fringes of the Ming empire, particularly in the southwest, had been governed by a combination of hereditary local officials, generally drawn from native minority groups, and centrally appointed officials. Known as the *tusi* system, these local officials were typically given considerable latitude in managing their affairs so long as they submitted taxes and tribute in goods (such as lumber and precious metals) and contributed to military expeditions at both the local and national levels.¹⁷ But over the course of the Ming dynasty as the majority Han population expanded they moved into the southwest and began occupying these lands, often with the support and encouragement of the central government, which was eager to bring them under tighter administrative jurisdiction for both fiscal and security reasons. As a result, uprisings and disturbances were common. In the final decades of the Ming the situation became ever more precarious as central control was even harder to implement and local agents of the throne had a free hand to increase their exactions so long as they possessed the connections and military force needed. The uprising of Sha Dingzhou into which Sun Kewang and his brothers inserted themselves, was rooted in just these kinds of power struggles and suppression campaigns.¹⁸

According to surviving records, Sha had murdered his elder brother to get his local appointment and marry the daughter of another chieftain. He then moved to occupy the stockades of his rivals. As he was doing this, another local leader named Wu Bikui revolted and had to be pacified by the preeminent Ming official in the region, Mu Tianbo. Though Mu and his agents succeeded in capturing Wu in the fall of 1645 and bringing him to justice, Sha then stirred up other local elements against Mu because the Mu clan (which had held power in the region for centuries) was reputedly fabulously wealthy and refused to share their largesse with the other *tusi*.¹⁹ So Sha stole into Mu's residence in Yunnanfu (Kunming) in the dead of night and occupied it, putting Mu and his family on the run. Though some token resistance was offered, Mu himself fled west to the city of Chuxiong, where Wu Bikui had recently been captured as his allies scrambled to contain Sha and vice versa.²⁰ Though Mu's supporters could not completely reverse the tide, they managed to entrench themselves in several fortified positions and dispatched envoys to seek aid from the nominal Southern Ming government outside the province. Over the ensuing year through 1646 repeated assaults on Chuxiong by Sha Dingzhou were repulsed. In late 1646 Sun Kewang received word of the crisis from an official he had known several years earlier as a consequence of having brokered a surrender agreement for Zhang Xianzhong. So Sun claimed he was the brother-in-law of Mu Tianbo and vowed to "avenge" him, entering

Sun's forces were experienced and disciplined and they restored order quickly around the provincial capital. After occupying Yunnanfu, Sun personally led troops west towards Chuxiong, while detailing Li Dingguo to settle affairs in the eastern part of Yunnan where Sha Dingzhou had sought refuge. It was at this time that Sun began publicly proclaiming his desire to "return allegiance to the Ming," though most sources suggest his motives were purely selfish whereas Li Dingguo and other adoptive brothers were more sincere in their avowed loyalties.²² In any event, Sun promised the Ming official Yang Weizhi that he would adhere to Yang's three basic conditions for an alliance with the Ming. These were: 1) Abandoning the official calendar of Zhang Xianzhong and therefore disavowing his connection to the now defunct rebel government; 2) Refraining from killing people needlessly; and 3) Prohibiting burning, pillage and rape by his troops.²³ To his credit Sun appears to have adhered to the second two of these conditions at least and for the first several years of his administration in Yunnan, things were better than they had been there for decades. In any event, with the formal collaboration of the Ming officials the western part of Yunnan was secured in short order, though Sha Dingzhou was still at large in the east. But a number of prominent Ming officials, most notably, Mu Tianbo, soon returned to Yunnanfu and lent legitimacy to Sun's burgeoning regime.

STRIFE BETWEEN "BROTHERS"

These events would establish somewhat of a pattern. As Sun was politicking, Li Dingguo was off fighting. Li Dingguo found himself embroiled in an exceptionally bloody battle at Lin'an against one of Sha Dingzhou's subordinates. The city held out for ten days until Li took the north tower by mining and sapping operations. He had also dug out the ground in front of the walls and constructed ramparts and protective barriers that allowed his men to work under cover. They extended a series of fuses at several locations and lit them simultaneously to bring the walls down. As soon as the fuses went off, the soldiers burst into the city through the gaps and a bloody street fight ensued.²⁴ He then allegedly massacred the entire population of the city, 78,000 in total according to some accounts. The city walls and streets were "white with bones" and many hung or immolated themselves rather than be subjected to torture by the victorious forces.²⁵ Interestingly, however, sources universally note that this was the last recorded instance of Li Dingguo perpetrating such a massacre against a civilian population and

that it was occasioned by the ferocity of the resistance and the bloody street fighting. For after he torched Lin'an Li encountered thousands of women along the roads and refugees were everywhere. Once the rebellion was over, the erstwhile new rulers went about rebuilding cities and towns all over the province and establishing good relations with the local populace. Meanwhile, in response to Li's initial actions, Sha Dingzhou sent his own agents out to loot and rape and tens of thousands were killed in the resulting operations in the eastern part of the province.²⁶ But Li's power was clearly rising as he now commanded a force estimated at some 50,000 Han and Lolo (aboriginal) troops and he returned to Yunnanfu in triumph.

At the same time Sun Kewang was hastily making arrangements to elevate himself more formally above his brothers, declaring himself "Ruler of the Realm" (*guo zhu*) and taking an elevated seat in formal gatherings and military reviews in his new seat of Yunnanfu. Though his brothers were still honored as princes, Sun was clearly foremost and he started setting up governmental ministries, starting with the Ministries of Personnel and Rites, appointed prime ministers (from amongst the former Ming officials) and started minting coinage, a vital step for any would-be ruler.²⁷ He also moved to attract commoners to return to the city to stimulate commerce and make it a more viable political center.²⁸ Sun burned peasant homes outside the city to create a military drilling and parade grounds and established strict regulations for travel, issuing passes to commoners and forbidding women from moving freely about without permission. Salt mines were regulated and officials appointed to oversee them. Sun also embarked upon a major weapons manufacturing program and forced people to donate clothing, tents, and the like for the upkeep of the military. But he also rationalized tax rates and took measures to ameliorate the suffering of the people.²⁹

But, countering his earlier promise to Yang Weizhi, Sun erected an ancestral temple to Zhang Xianzhong. He also created additional protocols designed to elevate himself over his brothers, sitting in an elevated position at functions and putting his own surname on all princely banners, possibly due to jealousy over Li Dingguo's greater military reputation.³⁰ Matters came to a head in the fourth month of 1648 when the various military units were gathered at the training grounds and Sun was to be recognized as Grand Marshal of the armies. All were to fire cannon blasts and unfurl their banners in homage to Sun but when Li Dingguo refused to defer, he was tied up and sentenced to 100 strokes of the cane. Other commanders tried to intercede but Li said, "Since the death of our father we have been like hands and feet with no ruler amongst us, but now we must honor you as superior? If this is how things are going to be from now on, then how can we live

together in peace?”³¹

Sun then said that if the others regarded him as the ruler they had to abide by his sentence of 100 lashes. Li said, “You would really dare hit me?” Sun replied, “It’s not my decision. This is martial law. How can you not be bound by it?”³² Li was then tied up, but the sentence was reduced to fifty at the intercession of Bai Wenxuan and Liu Wenxiu and by virtue of Li’s pledge to eradicate Sha Dingzhou to atone for his transgression.³³ Sun and Li then wept and embraced tearfully, pledging to remain “brothers.”³⁴ But from this point on the enmity between Li and Sun grew.

Heading back into the field, Li took the outlying defenses of Sha’s mountain stronghold from a commander known as Hei Laohu (Black Tiger), who had held out against Liu Wenxiu for some eight months. But Shao still had a strong network of mountain stockades held by his allies and in-laws that were interspersed at a distance of about ten *li* (approx. 3.3 miles) in a ring around his central hold. So Li went about cutting them off and closed in on the innermost fort, cutting its water supply and laying siege to it for three months. Sha tried to break the siege by rolling huge logs onto Li’s units and leading sallies forth to no avail. Li’s men initially used sapping tactics and battering rams to weaken the walls of Sha’s stronghold. Then they cut their own dams and released the pent-up waters into the fort. Sha and his wife were captured. Li burned the stockade and a few followers escaped, but in marked contrast to his earlier massacre, this time Li promised leniency so long as Sha’s followers refrained from looting and plundering. Violators would be killed.³⁵ Li brought the ringleaders back to Yunnanfu, and following the practice of his late master Zhang Xianzhong, had Sha Dingzhou publicly flayed alive.³⁶ Sun Kewang was understandably pleased at the apprehension of Sha Dingzhou but dismayed at Li’s growing reputation and popularity with the men so he now sought formal investiture as a Ming prince from the Southern Ming Emperor Yongli.³⁷

In terms of Li’s skills as a general, the campaign against Sha Dingzhou reveals several of his admirable qualities. First, despite being from relatively arid northwest China, Li proved very adept at utilizing the terrain of the southwestern jungles and mountains to his advantage. He easily took the fight to Sha Dingzhou on his own turf. Drawing upon his nearly two decades of experience as a peasant rebel commander Li showed considerable ability in siege operations, employing both offensive and defensive siege tactics. His reliance upon gunpowder weapons would be emphasized throughout his long career. He made extensive use of local troops and spies and seems to have been especially adroit at cultivating good relations with local tribal and aboriginal

groups. And the lenience he showed to Sha's defeated followers, in marked contrast to his excesses of the year before, show how Li had evolved as a commander. He knew how to win hearts and minds, as the saying goes. He was also popular with his men and his fellow commanders, something which seems to have especially raised the ire of Sun Kewang.

LI'S STAR RISES

Yet, for the next several years things between Sun and Li were pretty good, at least on the surface. While Sun schemed and intrigued for ever grander princely titles, Li set about training and equipping Sun's armies. As of 1652 the core of these armies numbered some 30,000 crack troops.³⁸ Li is credited in particular with gaining the allegiance of the *tusi* for the Southern Ming cause and their ranks would supply a major portion of the manpower for Li's subsequent operations. Over the next four years the winds of fortune blew back and forth between the contending Ming and Qing forces and the tides of war shifted numerous times accordingly. By 1652 Li was poised to assume a much more prominent role in these engagements. In the words of one modern scholar, "As war spread the armies multiplied and the sights and sounds of troops on the march were everywhere. Tents overran the mountains and the sound of tromping feet was like thunder."³⁹ Li was directed by Sun to head east with some 50,000 troops and counter the Qing thrust into Hunan, which was perilously close to Sun's new positions in Guangxi and Guizhou provinces.⁴⁰ As Li's armies moved east he issued five regulations: 1) Don't kill people; 2) Don't commit arson; 3) Don't rape; 4) Don't take food or water from common folk; and 5) Don't steal valuables from ordinary people. All violations were punishable by death.⁴¹

Li's regulations are a testament to the general chaos and disorder associated with not just Ming troops but early modern armies everywhere. In the waning days of the Ming, government forces were often more feared than those of the peasant rebels because they often saw the locals, their women, and their property as the rightful spoils of victory rather than the subjects they were supposed to protect. Some peasant rebel leaders gained very positive reputations by virtue of controlling the depredations of their troops and Li apparently learned from this example. It should be noted that despite his unsavory reputation, Zhang Xianzhong had issued similar regulations for his troops upon his assumption of power in Sichuan so there was ample precedent for Li's actions. Additionally, as Li was now embroiled in a

national contest for the loyalty and support of the masses, good behavior on the part of his troops could have a serious propaganda effect vis-à-vis the Qing, whose massacres, however infrequent, had garnered them an unsavory reputation.

In particular Li found himself faced with reversing the recent victories of the Chinese defector prince, Kong Youde, (d. 1652), who had risen to high station under the Manchus after fleeing to their banner upon the defeat of a troop mutiny he led in the 1630s.⁴² Over the previous couple of years Kong and his fellow Chinese princes had reversed Southern Ming victories and closed in on the fugitive Southern Ming court. Kong now held the strategically important city of Guilin in Guangxi province. Thrusting northeast, Li Dingguo captured Baoqing in south-central Huguang in the fifth month of 1652 and left his ally Feng Shuangli there as he camped at Wugang, roughly 110 miles due north of Guilin. Bolstered by reinforcements, Li sent 40,000 troops towards Guilin. They first occupied Quanzhou, northeast of Guilin, and Li dispatched another 60,000 men to advance on Guilin from the east. Kong sent his own men out to engage the Ming forces but they were defeated multiple times. So on the 29th day of the sixth month, Kong sent troops to garrison Yan Pass, the strategic gateway to Guilin.

Personally leading his troops, Li sent his elephant cavalry at the Qing defenses. The initial Ming push was repulsed and Li had to kill an elephant driver so as to restore morale and set an example. The Ming forces mounted another charge and smashed through the Qing lines as corpses piled up in a driving rainstorm. Kong Youde barely escaped alive.⁴³ The Ming pursued the retreating Qing to the nearby Darong River and Kong Youde pulled back to Guilin, sealing up the gates. Li and his forces arrived three days later. Kong tried to negotiate a settlement through a mediator in Li's camp. Li arrayed his forces around the city. Their drums shook the earth and their flags covered the fields. Kong Youde sent one last messenger for help, but knew it was not forthcoming. Li finally opened fire and the cannonades rained down for two days, wearing down the defenders until on the fourth day of the seventh month they hit the walls with cloud ladders. Some sources suggest that Li Dingguo led fifty men and entered via a culvert or water pipe, then giving a signal for a general assault.⁴⁴

Directing the defenses from atop the battlements, Kong was clipped by an arrow at one point. As the attackers scaled the walls, Kong resolved to flee but could find no escape route. So he retreated to his residence, killed his wife and immolated himself.⁴⁵ A bloody street fight followed as the Ming forces secured the city. Li captured surviving members of Kong's family and executed them, including Kong's young

son, in retribution for the Ming officials Kong had previously slain. As a result of this victory Li's troops became known as the "Reckless troops" (*man bing*).

The defeat of Kong, who had killed a pair of prominent Ming officials in his occupation of Guilin and was roundly reviled by the Ming side, was a major, albeit short-lived, turning point in the war. Soon all of Guangxi was back in Ming hands and many people and erstwhile Qing commanders were defecting back to the Ming side.⁴⁶ Li was praised all around and likened to the anti-hero and military genius Cao Cao (155–220), another figure from the Three Kingdoms era.⁴⁷ Li himself said his success was due to emulating the training and discipline of Cao Cao. He also had discussions with Confucian scholars about other famous strategists and generals of yore, hoping to learn from them. Over the next couple of months Li's conquest spread east and by the autumn of that year Li had recaptured over 3,000 *li* of territory in just seven months.⁴⁸ Around the same time Liu Wenxiu was making headway in Sichuan. He captured Chengdu and pushed north in the fall of 1652, hoping to drive the Qing out of the province entirely.⁴⁹

In the wake of these reverses in the southwest the Qing court made the former Ming official Hong Chengchou (1593–1665) the Military Superintendent of Southwest China and dispatched the Manchu Prince Nikan at the head of 100,000 troops to stabilize the military situation, giving him the title of Generalissimo in charge of Pacifying Huguang and Guizhou.⁵⁰ The grandson of the Qing founder Nurhaci and a member of the Bordered Blue Banner, Nikan had a formidable military reputation and it was believed that sending more Manchu troops in would have added shock value. His orders stressed that his men were not to loot and pillage liberated lands. Officials who had fallen into "rebel" hands but returned to the Qing of their own accord were to be treated leniently and those who gained merit would be promoted.⁵¹ He set out for the front on the 20th day of the seventh month. About a month later he got a new order to go to Guangxi and was promised help from Xi'an, in Shaanxi province. The Qing also ordered the defector Wu Sangui (1611–78) to retake Guizhou, though he'd find himself embroiled in battles in Sichuan.⁵²

Nikan enjoyed early success and pushed the Ming forces back, taking several towns by the 19th day of the 11th month. At the time Li was at Hengzhou, two of his key allies were at Changsha and the forward army was at Yuezhou. Li knew the Qing were coming in force so he told the others to abandon Changsha, which was more exposed in northeastern Huguang, and lure the Qing back along the Xiang River. The initial ambush worked but then Sun Kewang ordered Li's ally Feng Shuangli to

secretly pull back to Baoqing. Another commander, unsure of the current battle plan, followed him. So now Li was faced with a larger Qing force than he anticipated. They fought a sharp engagement outside Hengzhou, sustaining about equal losses and Li feigned defeat and retreated. He inflicted heavy losses on Nikan's forces at Qiyang but then fell back towards Yongzhou. Nikan, hungry for victory, pursued Li and fell into a perfectly executed ambush on the 24th day of the 11th month of 1652.⁵³ Nikan's army, stretched out like a snake, was cut into three pieces by Li Dingguo. Personally leading the Miao (minority) contingent Li brandished a great sword from horseback as he directed the battle. The Qing commander fought till the end, drawing his sword when he ran out of arrows but, pierced by multiple spears, Nikan finally fell from his horse and was slain.⁵⁴

When news of Li's victory spread, his fame increased even more as he had now killed two prominent Qing princes and several other mid-ranking commanders in just a few months. The Ming court showered honors upon him and their Qing foes were shocked. There was feasting and celebration in Guiyang (Sun Kewang's headquarters) for three days and Sun offered to name Li the Prince of Xining, at which he demurred, saying, "The reward of enfeoffment comes from the Son of Heaven. How can one prince enfeoff another?"⁵⁵ Meanwhile Li sent funds to repair the emperor's living quarters.⁵⁶ This only served to anger Sun further. The Qing Emperor Shunzhi allegedly called it the "greatest defeat in the history of the dynasty."⁵⁷ Li was praised as a "Little Zhuge Liang" by his allies. Some argue that Li's victories were due in part to the widespread support he had from the local minorities but it seems that his own inspired and daring leadership played a greater role than any nascent sense of anti-Manchu nationalism.⁵⁸

For their part, the Qing rushed troops to the southwest and ordered commanders in the southeast to reinforce their defensive positions.⁵⁹ They complained that many people were reverting to the Ming side and that spies and traitors were everywhere.⁶⁰ Militarily the commanders complained about the lack of food and supplies, the overextension of their lines and the Ming use of elephant cavalry, which spooked their horses. Tropical diseases were also taking a heavy toll on the nomads from the north.⁶¹ They feared that the entire battle front might open to the sea, where other Ming loyalist groups were operating and as a result the entire southern half of the empire could revert to Ming control.

Thus the time seemed right to extend the fight to the east but Sun Kewang was increasingly jealous of Li and refused to support him. Worse still, he apparently concocted several plots to assassinate Li, though Dingguo was too savvy to fall for Sun's tricks and had been

warned by other commanders of Sun's duplicity.⁶² But unsupported, Li's military strength soon dissipated so much that when they camped at Changsha soon thereafter people could not tell Li's ragged troops from commoners.⁶³ Even so, Li found himself the recipient of overtures from courtiers at Yongli's court at Anlong, where he had been essentially placed under house arrest by Sun Kewang.⁶⁴ Li was now seen as the one who could carry the Ming cause and get the hapless monarch out from under Sun's thumb.

In the meantime, against the advice of his own subordinates, Liu Wenxiu had suffered a crushing defeat in pressing an attack on Baoning in northern Sichuan, losing thousands of men, hundreds of cannon and many officers.⁶⁵ Sun Kewang was likewise defeated in a campaign against the Qing that he had hoped would elevate his own military star.⁶⁶ So all the momentum gained in the previous year evaporated and the Southern Ming forces were not only thrown back on the defensive, but unprofitably bickering with one another. It is also suggested that Li did not want to go directly up against Sun at this time because he feared for his family (who were still all in Yunnan) and he did not want to cast away all he had won. Not wanting to retreat and wary of falling into Sun Kewang's grasp, Li Dingguo elected to mount a campaign southeast into Guangdong province, besieging Zhaoqing in the west. He also briefly assailed Guilin again in 1654, as it had been retaken by the Qing but then he moved further east into Guangdong. Though his operations were most likely doomed from the start owing to a lack of support from Sun Kewang, Li's movements and actions caused considerable trepidation in Qing circles, particularly from the perspective of the ever cautious Hong Chengchou.⁶⁷ And in an interesting parallel to Ming governmental reports from a few years earlier, Qing officials complained about the great mobility of the Southern Ming units and how it was difficult to catch them because they so easily slipped into the countryside and hid amongst the peasants. This forced the Qing to divide their strength in pursuit and offered few concrete targets for offensive operations.⁶⁸

RESCUING THE EMPEROR

Li met with some successes in Guangdong but was too overextended to hold much territory and finally withdrew west in 1655 after the failed siege of Xinhui, resolving to extricate Yongli from his plight at last.⁶⁹ When Li finally pulled back he left a few thousand troops scattered at various places throughout Guangdong. Amongst his own followers were barely 10,000 troops and three war elephants, along with 60,000—

70,000 men, women, and children, representing an attrition rate of a whopping 75 percent of the forces he began his eastward campaign with.⁷⁰

Thus Li began his final showdown with Sun, even as his own military power was on the wane. But he had a couple of major advantages over Sun. He had maintained very good relations with most of his fellow commanders and treated them well. He also had a proven reputation as a battlefield commander. And for what it was worth, should he manage to free the emperor, he could promise his supporters “legitimate” Ming titles of nobility, something that had eluded Sun Kewang despite the fact that he had finally been invested as a Ming prince himself. Few really accepted Sun’s viability as a ruler and without Li’s string of victories, Sun’s status was fuzzy to say the least. So, as he had done before, Li managed to co-opt Sun’s lieutenants and “rescued” Yongli from Anlong, spiriting him away to Yunnanfu. At the crucial moment he allegedly addressed members of Sun’s army sent against him and said, “The Son of Heaven is here. Kewang wants to be a murderous traitor. If you wish to do that which is right, how can you follow the commands of an evil murderer and thus counter the Way of Heaven?”⁷¹

As promised, the grateful emperor showered titles of nobility on Li, Bai Wenxuan, Li Wenxiu and the others who had supported him.⁷² Nonetheless, Li felt bad about his estrangement from Sun and he tried to mend the fences several times, sending letters via Liu Wenxiu and even returning Sun’s wife and concubines unharmed to Guiyang. These met with no response and Sun prepared for a final military confrontation with his brother turned rival. Again, however, Li had co-opted Sun’s generals and at a key point in their conflict at the Sancha River, Bai Wenxuan, who was somewhat inexplicably put in charge of Sun’s vanguard, defected to Li’s side and turned on his supposed allies. Sun tried unsuccessfully to rally his forces, but Li closed on him in a pincer movement and Sun was put to the run. Liu Wenxiu was dispatched to pursue him but Sun managed to elude him and staggered into Hong Chengchou’s camp a few weeks later with a few family members and surrendered to the Qing.⁷³

HOLDING OUT AGAINST THE QING

But by this point Li had perhaps exhausted too much of his power in fighting Sun and now he was scrambling to prepare for the inevitable Qing onslaught. Compounding matters was the fact that Yongli remained indecisive, happy to simply be out of Sun Kewang’s clutches, and his court was factionalized and refused to choose a course of action.

Li too, seemed curiously unable to effect an effective battle plan and spent too much time eradicating former supporters of Sun Kewang in Yunnan rather than trying to attract them to his service and embark upon military operations while the Qing were still off balance. Li's vacillation gave the Qing time to muster their forces for a massive invasion of Yunnan from three directions. The overall campaign was orchestrated by Hong Chengchou, aided significantly by maps and intelligence concerning Li's defenses provided by Sun Kewang, though Hong refused Sun's offers to lead the Qing forces, not trusting Sun.

Li Dingguo sent two commanders to guard Sanpo, the approach from Sichuan province, from whence Wu Sangui was advancing. He sent another to hold Sun's old capital at Guiyang in Guizhou and personally oversaw the defenses at Jigongbei, hoping to use its location on the Guizhou-Yunnan border to flank the Qing. Bai Wenxuan was detailed to defend Qixing Pass located between these other locations in the northern part of Yunnan.⁷⁴ The Qing advance began in the spring of 1658 through Sichuan and by the fall they were entering Yunnan.⁷⁵ Li's flanks were quickly overrun so he took his whole army to resist the Qing at Shuanghekou. Li still had some elephant cavalry and significant superiority in firearms. When the battle commenced along the Yanzhe River, Li's forces initially appeared to have the advantage as the Qing bows were no match for the spears, gun, cannon and elephants of the defenders. But then the wind shifted and the cannon smoke shifted back into the eyes of the Ming forces.⁷⁶ Li was forced to withdraw to the north bank of another river, the Pan, and from there fell back towards Yunnanfu. He burned the bridges behind him but the Qing simply constructed floating bridges to continue their pursuit.

The Ming court at Yunnanfu debated three courses of action. The one favored by Li was to strike north into Sichuan and join up with the loosely organized bandits and sometime Ming allies known as the Kuidong 13. These were remnants of the bandit/peasant rebel armies of Li Zicheng that had operated in the Sichuan-Huguang border area for over a decade. Others advocated flight southeast through Vietnam to the coast where they could join the Ming rebel loyalist Zheng Chenggong (1624-62) and his allies. The third choice was to flee to Burma and try to encourage the locals in Yunnan to keep up the fight while the court marshaled its strength. That was the course they finally chose, though there was a plot by the son of Li's former adoptive brother (Ai Chengye) to arrest him and turn him over to the Qing.⁷⁷ Li then begged Yongli to dismiss him and take away his ceremonial axe of authority, prompting Yongli to reply, "This is a natural disaster, what crime has the prince committed?"⁷⁸

The emperor and his retinue, initially over 100,000, fled west, pursued at a somewhat measured pace by the Qing. As Yongli fled from town to town towards Burma, Li again contemplated heading north into Sichuan but was overruled. After the Qing took the city of Yongchang, Li set up an ambush at Mount Mopan, using his last 6,000 troops against a Qing force of perhaps ten times that size. Li's plan was to establish three ambush points and wait until the entire Qing force was on the narrow mountain trails before attacking. But the plot was revealed by a defector when only two thirds of the Qing force had ascended the trail and the ambush was triggered too early. The heavy fighting lasted from dawn until noon with bodies piling up on both sides. Several commanders died on both sides. Li Dingguo himself was hit by shrapnel as he directed the battle from high up on the mountain. But sorely outnumbered, Li had to withdraw to Tengyue, though the Qing losses were such that their commander was later demoted.⁷⁹

In the spring of 1659 the rump Ming court entered Burma where they were disarmed and placed under house arrest by the king for the next three plus years. Li Dingguo and Bai Wenxuan made several efforts to rescue the monarch only to be thwarted by supply woes, disease, and counterattacks by the Burmese. At one point they even built boats for a naval assault on the Burmese capital but they were burned.⁸⁰ Li also tried to stir up the *tusi* in Yunnan against the Manchu occupiers by investing them with Ming titles and promises of future support from Yongli.⁸¹ The largest of these was unmasked and crushed by Wu Sangui before it came to fruition.⁸² Li continued limited guerrilla operations, but as the Qing closed in, Bai Wenxuan and he discussed their options, including surrender. Li told him, "Now that things have come to this, there's no point in talking of a [Ming] restoration anymore. The only thing I have left is my loyalty. My death is already a certainty. But tell my ruler father that I'm resolved to accept this end."⁸³ Bai chose to surrender, but Li resolved to fight on.

The Qing forces led by Wu Sangui and the Manchu Prince Aissinga captured Yongli in the fall of 1661 and returned to Yunnan with him, executing him in the spring of 1662. Li Dingguo died of illness along the China-Burma border a few weeks later.⁸⁴ Before he died, he charged his son to never submit to the Qing but he ignored his father's wishes and received a Qing title of nobility and comfortable stipend upon his surrender. Some versions of the story claim that Li received a concubine from the King of Siam in his later days and a pledge of military support from the Thai monarch, but there is no evidence of what happened to the concubine. Some of Li's followers held out in the rugged lands between the Chinese and Burmese border for years.

LI'S MEMORY AND LEGACY

For his part, as mentioned above, Li Dingguo has been remembered as a minor hero of sorts in modern China, a memory drawn from the laudatory biographies of him that emerged during and just after his lifetime. Li apparently traveled in more exalted circles than the typical peasant rebel and had many admirers amongst the literati, including the famous scholar Wang Fuzhi (1619–92), author of the *Yongli shilu*, an account of the tumultuous reign of the last Ming claimant. In the modern period the interest of the Chinese Communists in extolling the virtues of peasant heroes made Li a celebrated figure again. This has continued in modern novels.⁸⁵ As someone who also resisted foreign invasion and joined forces with minority groups, Li becomes triply attractive for such purposes. In the traditional context Li's popularity seems connected to his embodiment of so many cardinal Chinese virtues, most notably his loyalty to the Ming. Combined with the fact that he was also apparently literate and attracted to storied heroes of China's past (even allowing for embellishment in the sources), Li becomes an unusual paragon indeed.

From a military standpoint Li was also noteworthy. He was daring, aggressive, inventive, adaptable and compassionate. He shared hardships with his men and sought to cultivate good ties with locals. He frequently made the most out of little, defeating numerically superior foes with cunning maneuvers and deft ambushes. He mastered fighting in a variety of terrains and situations, excelling at mobile guerrilla warfare, siegecraft, amphibious warfare, and even the use of elephant cavalry. He mastered the technologies of his era, making facile use of guns and emphasizing training.

Finally, in perhaps the most lasting complement for a military man, he has had a chicken dish named after him: Prince Jin Cubed Chicken. The dish features local Yunnan pears and was allegedly created by a local matron who had to feed Li when he was passing through her village. She felt that plain chicken was not good enough for a prince, so she added pears (incidentally the same word 李 as his surname) to make the dish more special. Not bad for a peasant from Shaanxi. Move over General Zuo and Colonel Sanders!

NOTES

- 1 There are many biographies of Li in contemporary and Qing-era sources. The only full-length modern biographical study of Li is Guo Yingqiu, *Li Dingguo jinian* Repr. (Beijing: Renmin daxue chubanshe, 2005). For a brief English

language biography of Li, see Arthur W. Hummel, ed., *Eminent Chinese of the Qing Period* Repr. (Great Barrington, MA: Berkshire 2018), 307. Hereafter ECQP.

- 2 Though perhaps not quite as famous as his contemporary and rival Li Zicheng (1606–45), Zhang Xianzhong was one of the leading figures in the late Ming peasant rebellions and remains a popular subject of study today. A brief English language biography of Zhang can be found in ECQP, 881–2. Recent Chinese language biographies include Wang Xingye, *Jiaoxiaode Zhang Xianzhong* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2008); and Zheng Guanglu, *Zhang Xianzhong jiao Sichuan zhenxiang* (Chengdu: Sichuan minzu chubanshe, 2010). For a detailed study of Zhang's military operations that includes references to Li Dingguo and his "brothers'" activities after Zhang's death, see Wang Gang, *Zhang Xianzhong Da Xin junshi* (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1987). Also see Kenneth M. Swope, *On the Trail of the Yellow Tiger: War, Trauma, and Social Dislocation in Southwest China During the Ming-Qing Transition* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2018).
- 3 Also known as the "Crouching Dragon" (*wo long*) Zhuge Liang is one of the most celebrated heroes in Chinese history and folklore, though most people are more familiar with his portrayal in the Ming dynasty novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* than in his actual life and activities. For a short English language biography, see Herbert A. Giles, *A Chinese Biographical Dictionary* Repr. (Taipei: Chengwen chubanshe, 1975), 180–82. For a modern translation of the novel, see Luo Guanzhong, *Three Kingdoms: A Historical Novel* trans. by Moss Roberts, 2 vols. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004).
- 4 On the desire to "erase the bandit moniker," see Nan Bingwen, *Nan Ming shi* (Beijing: Gugong chubanshe, 2012), 234–5. On the desire to prevent racial oppression by the Manchus, see Li Shangying and Wang Zhengyo, "Lun Qingchu nongmin jun de lian Ming kang Qing," *Xuexi yu sikao* 1981.1 (1981), 71–4. Also see Ye Huosheng, *Mingmo nongmin qiyi jun lian Ming kang Qing* (Beijing: Zhongnan renmin chubanshe, 1951).
- 5 For an overview of Li's positive attributes and outstanding contributions to Chinese history, see Guo, *Li Dingguo jinian*, preface, 9–20.
- 6 For a brief English language biography of Sun, see ECQP, 564–5. For a full-length modern Chinese biography, see Xiong Zongren, *Sun Kewang yu Yongli huangdi* (Guiyang: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 1982).
- 7 On the broader context of the outbreak of the peasant rebellions, see Kenneth M. Swope, *The Military Collapse of China's Ming Dynasty, 1618–1644* (London: Routledge, 2014), 76–9; and Li Wenzhi, *Wan Ming minbian: Diceng baodong yu Mingchao de pengkui* (Beijing: Zhongguo dianying chubanshe, 2013), 17–29.
- 8 Guo, *Li Dingguo jinian*, 5.
- 9 Wang Fuzhi, *Yongli shilu* (Beijing: Beijing guji chubanshe, 2001), 140. Hereafter YLSL.
- 10 Guo, *Li Dingguo jinian*, 26.
- 11 YLSL, 140. For a brief biography of Wang, see ECQP, 620–22.
- 12 It was fairly common during the late Ming period for military commanders and bandit leaders to adopt orphans or foundlings. In some cases the children were apparently given as gifts or possibly sold into service, though sources do not always provide specifics. In Li's case it is unclear why he joined Zhang, though Guo Yingqiu speculates that it was after Li's natural father died, perhaps due to one of the famines or epidemics that plagued the region. See Guo, *Li Dingguo*

jinian, 5.

- 13 There are myriad survey accounts of the late Ming peasant rebellions in Chinese. To give just one example in addition to the other sources cited herein, see Gu Cheng, *Mingmo nongmin zhanzheng shi* (Beijing: Guangming ribao chubanshe, 2012). The standard English language account remains James B. Parsons, *Peasant Rebellions of the Late Ming Dynasty* Repr. (Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies, 1993).
- 14 Concerning Ming anti-rebel strategies, particularly pertaining to Zhang Xianzhong, see Kenneth M. Swope, “Of Bureaucrats and Bandits: Confucianism and Antirebel Strategy at the End of the Ming Dynasty,” in Wayne E. Lee, ed., *Warfare and Culture in World History* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 61–88.
- 15 Guo, *Li Dingguo jinian*, 26.
- 16 On Zhang’s depredations in Sichuan, see Kenneth M. Swope, “Rivers of Blood & Roads of Bones: Sichuan in the Ming-Qing Transition,” in Kenneth M. Swope and Tonio Andrade, eds., *Early Modern Asia: War, Commerce and Cultural Exchange* (London: Routledge, 2018), 34–64. The larger context of Zhang’s career and its implications are discussed in Swope, *On the Trail of the Yellow Tiger*.
- 17 On the Ming *tusi* system, see Leo K. Shin, *The Making of the Chinese State: Ethnicity and Expansion on the Ming Borderlands* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). For a general examination of minority peoples in the Ming empire, see Yang Shaoxian and Mo Junqing, *Mingdai minzu shi* (Chengdu: Sichuan minzu chubanshe, 1996).
- 18 The rebellion is treated in its entirety in Feng Su, *Dian kao* (Taipei: Chengwen chubanshe, 1967), 379–94, which is a more or less contemporary account. Hereafter *DK*.
- 19 *DK*, 384.
- 20 On these actions, see the biography of the official Yang Weizhi in Xu Zi, *Xiaotian jizhuan* 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1958), 311. Hereafter *XTJZ*.
- 21 *DK*, 388, and *XTJZ*, 311.
- 22 See *DK*, 389, and Guo, *Li Dingguo jinian*, 73.
- 23 *XTJZ*, 311–12, and *DK*, 389.
- 24 Guo, *Li Dingguo jinian*, 77–8.
- 25 *DK*, 390, and *XTJZ*, 360.
- 26 *DK*, 390–91.
- 27 *DK*, 392.
- 28 Guo, *Li Dingguo jinian*, 79–80.
- 29 Guo, *Li Dingguo jinian*, 81.
- 30 Xiong, *Sun Kewang yu Yongli Huangdi*, 16.
- 31 Xiong, *Sun Kewang yu Yongli Huangdi*, 18.
- 32 Xiong, *Sun Kewang yu Yongli Huangdi*, 18.
- 33 *XTJZ*, 360–361; Xiong, *Sun Kewang yu Yongli Huangdi*, 17–18; and Zhao Erxun et al., comps, *Qing shigao* 4 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), 9169. Hereafter *QSG*.
- 34 See Xiong, *Sun Kewang yu Yongli Huangdi*, 18–20 for full details.
- 35 Guo, *Li Dingguo jinian*, 85.
- 36 *QSG*, 9169.

- 37 On the “investiture controversy” of Sun Kewang, see Yang Lurong, *San Fan jishi benmo*, repr. in *Lidai jishi benmo* 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), 64–7. Note that each work in this compilation is paginated separately.
- 38 See Teng Shaozhen, *San Fan shilue* 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2008), 698. Hereafter *SFSL*.
- 39 Guo, *Li Dingguo jinian*, 103.
- 40 QSG, 9169. Some sources claim Li had as many as 80,000 troops when bolstered by those of Sun’s other commanders. See *SFSL*, 699.
- 41 Guo, *Li Dingguo jinian*, 103.
- 42 For a brief biography of Kong Youde, see *ECQP*, 294. For details on the so-called Wuqiao Mutiny led by Kong, see Swope, *Military Collapse*, 95–103.
- 43 Guo, *Li Dingguo jinian*, 104–5.
- 44 *SFSL*, 700.
- 45 Guo, *Li Dingguo jinian*, 105.
- 46 *XTJZ*, 362.
- 47 Guo, *Li Dingguo jinian*, 106. For a biography of Cao Cao, see Giles, 761–3.
- 48 Guo, *Li Dingguo jinian*, 107.
- 49 QSG, 9169.
- 50 Hong is a controversial figure in Chinese history and historiography even today. For a recent English language biography, see Chen-main Wang, *The Life and Career of Hung Ch’eng-ch’ou (1593–1665): Public Service in a Time of Dynastic Change* (Ann Arbor: Association for Asian Studies, 1999).
- 51 See Zhongguo Renmin Daxue History Dept., comps., *Qingdai nongmin zhanzheng shiliao xuan bian* 3 vols. (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 1984), 232–3. Hereafter *QNZS*.
- 52 As someone who changed sides prominently several times, Wu is possibly the most infamous of all the “twice-serving” generals. He had followed his father in military service from a young age and first gained fame in suppressing the aforementioned Wuqiao Mutiny of Kong Youde. He later gained infamy for turning over Shanhaiguan to the Manchus and joining them in defeating Li Zicheng, earning a principedom for his efforts. For a short English biography of Wu, see *ECQP*, 687–90. For a comprehensive Chinese biography, see Li Zhiting, *Wu Sangui da zhuan* (Nanjing: Jiangsu jiaoyu chubanshe, 2005).
- 53 Guo, *Li Dingguo jinian*, 108.
- 54 *SFSL*, 703–4.
- 55 *XTJZ*, 362.
- 56 *YLSL*, 145–6.
- 57 *SFSL*, 703.
- 58 See the discussion in Li and Wang, 72.
- 59 *QNZS*, 240.
- 60 For a list of the generals who reverted to the Ming side, see Guo, *Li Dingguo jinian*, 116–18.
- 61 See *QNZS*, 242–6.
- 62 *YLSL*, 147, and Guo, *Li Dingguo jinian*, 111.
- 63 Guo, *Li Dingguo jinian*, 109.
- 64 On Yongli’s overtures to Li, see Xiong, *Sun Kewang yu Yongli Huangdi*, 90–99.

On Sun's earlier machinations to gain control of Yongli, see Xiong, 39–59. Sun claimed to have welcomed Yongli to his protection to save him from Kong Youde.

65 YLSL, 145, and QNZS, 240–41.

66 QSG, 9170, and SFSL, 705–6.

67 See Hong's memorial in QNZS, 255–7.

68 QNZS, 260.

69 QSG, 9170. On Li's operations in Guangdong, also see Guo, *Li Dingguo jinian*, 111–27. Li spent much of 1654 ill with painful boils so he engaged in fewer operations at this time.

70 Guo, *Li Dingguo jinian*, 127.

71 YLSL, 149. On multiple occasions previously Sun had executed ministers at Yongli's court for intriguing against him in various ways, including those who were implicated in drafting the letters to Li asking to be rescued.

72 QSG, 9170–71.

73 QSG, 9171.

74 QSG, 9171–2.

75 For details see Guo, *Li Dingguo jinian*, 147–54.

76 XTJZ, 71–2.

77 XTJZ, 71.

78 XTJZ, 72.

79 QSG, 9172.

80 QSG, 9173.

81 QSG, 9172, and Guo, *Li Dingguo jinian*, 195.

82 XTJZ, 364.

83 Guo, *Li Dingguo jinian*, 193.

84 YLSL, 151.

85 See, for example, Guang Yin, *Nan Ming fengyun* (Guiyang: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 2013.)

PART V

INTERACTIONS



Traditionally the Ming was decried as insular, non-competitive, and xenophobic among other terms designed to emphasize the supposedly self-satisfied splendid isolation of the ruling dynasty and its elites. Over the past few decades, however, with the increasing availability of primary source materials from China coupled with exciting new archaeological discoveries, particularly in the maritime realm as discussed by Kenneth Hall below, such characterizations are undergoing a major transformation. While it is true that officially the Ming government at various times banned private overseas trade and sought to control both the inland and coastal frontiers to varying degrees for the sake of domestic stability, there was nevertheless a tremendous degree of interaction taking place between Ming subjects and the places and peoples around them. The studies in this part of the book highlight this fact, while also offering new approaches to old subjects. In recent years even formerly unfashionable topics such as the tributary system of foreign relations, once nearly discarded as a relic manifestation of Chinese insularity and elitism, have been reexamined in exciting new ways, revealing the depth and flexibility of such institutions and underscoring their importance within the broader Asian world. In the process the study of Ming interactions with its neighbors, on both the

micro and macro levels, has become one of the most stimulating and far reaching areas of scholarly inquiry with respect to the Ming world.

Fittingly, this part of the book begins with Edward Farmer's consideration of the Ming as a Eurasian power. Following the lead of many world historians, Farmer focuses on points of interchange between the Ming and its contemporaries and lists some similarities and differences between the Ming and these other powers, including the various Muslim "Gunpowder Empires" that held sway in India and across the Middle East. Farmer picks up on the non-competitive theme, nonetheless stressing that such behavior ended up benefitting the Ming and its subjects tremendously, by ensuring stability that allowed for widespread prosperity. Of course one must also consider the geographic context. The Ming was situated in a region where, owing to the particular dynamics of the erosion of the Mongol Empire, it was not directly threatened by the other major imperial powers. After the early Ming shows of force under Yongle, there was no pressing need to engage with these states militarily, as they posed no direct threat. Commercially, Ming needs were adequately met by closer neighbors. And when the state did eventually relax maritime trade bans in the 1560s, it became the major destination for global silver traders. There was no need for people in the Ming to find China, of course. Everyone else was coming to them for trade.

Farmer also reminds us of the comparatively short era of Western domination of the globe. And even the so-called "Rise of the West" in the early modern era was a long process wherein the mighty Asian empires still played key balancing roles. Asian powers had long dominated trade routes and served as disseminators of superior technologies. The greatest achievement of the Mongols was to knit these disparate places together, however briefly. The Ming was just one of several prominent empires to arise from the remnants of the Mongol conquests. As seen throughout the present book, the Ming built upon some trends initiated by the Mongols, but hearkened back to older precedents in other areas.

Also noteworthy is Farmer's observation that Ming influence "was exerted most strongly in social, economic, and cultural realms only tangentially subject to governmental attention and guidance." In fact it was by the efforts of private subjects, traders, and the like that Ming "soft power" was felt, not necessarily through the direct initiatives of the state, with a few notable exceptions such as the massive naval expeditions of Zheng He in the early Ming, discussed above by Sally Church. Viewed in this light the contemporary efforts by the People's Republic of China to tap into the networks and resources of overseas

Chinese around the globe in order to spread Chinese soft power, as well as their so-called “Zheng He Diplomacy” initiatives, are rather ironic.¹

In chapter twenty-one Kenneth Hall uses new studies based upon Southeast Asian written and archaeological sources to explore the centrality of Southeast Asian trade ties with the Ming. These new studies have revealed much more complex trade networks with more actors and agents than scholars have heretofore realized. These trade networks, according to Hall, “produced an inclusive extended eastern Indian Ocean borderless zone of contact” before the expanded European presence in the sixteenth century and beyond. Part of the problem has been the tendency for modern scholars, partly under the influence of competing nationalist projects and narratives, to think too much in terms of modern political entities rather than in terms of regional communication networks. As Hall demonstrates, political identities and borders were far more fluid in the early modern period than they are now and Southeast Asia in particular had traditionally been a region of heterogeneity and cultural interchanges. It was easy for such people and networks to operate beneath and between the eyes of state authorities. But Southeast Asia’s favorable geographic position between the giant Chinese and Indian empires greatly facilitated commercial exchanges, not to mention cultural networking that could have significant implications in conjunction with the consistent reorganization and reorientation of population centers.

In the course of his analysis, Hall wisely suggests caution in uncritically relying upon sources produced from imperial centers and emphasizes the need for understanding the vagaries of market trends and dynamics. Such an examination can yield surprising insights such as the observation that Southeast Asian marketplaces were considered important enough that Indian textiles were produced specifically for certain Southeast Asian markets. It also offers a corrective to Chinese accounts of the local implications of the Ming tributary system, as it was simply one more side of a multi-faceted trade system. In looking at the many factors behind the establishment of successful trading ports and communities, Hall also touches upon the practical aspects of attracting settlers and trade for the purpose of increasing tariff revenues.

The Ming state’s concern over the activities of its subjects abroad speaks to issues of security and legitimacy, as well as trade. It also appears that Ming subjects were well aware of such concerns and learned how to play the game when they wished to be repatriated or allowed to continue trading activities. They also acted as transmitters of culture and traditions, a point raised by Xing Hang above in his analysis of Ming loyalist diaspora communities. Hall’s study provides a rich

discussion of the political, social, and commercial implications of Ming diasporic communities' activities in the Southeast Asian parts of the Indian Ocean realm.

Next, John Whitmore examines Dai Viet in the Ming world. As one of the most heavily Sinicized of the tributary states, Dai Viet occupied a special place in the East Asian world order. But it was also the scene of a bitter war with the Ming and there was continual strife between the more Sinicized elite classes and the mass of Vietnamese society. Whitmore focuses on the former, tracing how they located their legitimacy in the practice of Chinese-derived court ritual. Interestingly, music was a key component of the rituals in question as its edifying characteristics were noted. Also worthy of comment here are the ways that Vietnamese elites, similar to their counterparts in Korea, deployed examples from ancient Chinese stories and Confucian texts to support their respective arguments. Part of being cultured in the greater Ming world was having an intimate understanding of Chinese historical and ritual precedents. This specialized knowledge would later be a means for the elites of these realms to demonstrate their superiority over the alien Manchus.

Along these lines the importance of rituals in publicly establishing dynastic legitimacy is suggestive. But it is also interesting that whereas the Vietnamese seemed more concerned with following Ming ritual procedures in order to highlight the sovereignty of the Vietnamese monarch, the Koreans were more inclined to use earlier Chinese precedents. Whitmore suggests that this was due to Korea's proximity to the Ming capital. The Koreans were more sensitive about appearing to put themselves on the same level as China, consciously choosing to embrace ritualistic vassal status. The Vietnamese, on the other hand, felt safer in asserting a level of equality.

Finally, the extent of contact between the Vietnamese literati and the Ming court shows how Ming rituals, protocols, and fashions were transmitted to Vietnam. The activities and reports of these embassies, like those from Korea discussed by Sixiang Wang below, also provided valuable information on current politics and factions in China. From the Chinese perspective, the ambassadors could be pumped for information about conditions back in their countries, allowing the Ming to keep tabs on their tributary vassals in hope of averting serious troubles such as those that had provoked the war in the early Yongle reign. And, as Whitmore finds, the experiences of literati and other ambassadors to China could be formative for them. Some sought to import the Chinese model while others sought to set Dai Viet on its own new path. Both could be said to have desired strengthening their own state. So in this

fashion the model of the Ming, both positive and negative, was encompassing and hard to quantify.

In chapter twenty-three Sixiang Wang continues the theme of studying envoys, but focuses upon eunuchs rather than literati. While the role of eunuchs in Inner Court politics has long been a subject of study in Western languages, only recently have scholars started seriously investigating other dimensions of eunuch service such as their roles as military officials and diplomats. In this piece Wang offers a different take on the tributary system from the perspective of Korean-born eunuch envoys. In the process he emphasizes, like Whitmore, the value of envoys for gathering intelligence about the Ming court and contemporary issues and policies. He also touches upon the important role played by eunuchs as mediators between the Ming and Chosôn.

Particularly salient is Wang's discussion of the multi-dimensional nature of envoy or tributary missions. They could, of course, be for ceremonial purposes. They could also be used to extract specific resources from the tributary such as horses or medicine. Sometimes they were initiated by the inferior party in order to gather information. Again, as was the case with envoys from Dai Viet, reform-minded Korean officials might bring ideas home for emulation or adoption. More prosaically, envoys might want to collect books, clothing, pottery, or other examples of Ming cultural artifacts. Wang's discussion of the political implications of requests by Korean monarchs for salacious or rare items is revealing in what it says about literati culture in Korea and the concern with making sure kings set proper examples for their subjects. That high-ranking officials also smuggled such illicit goods in when they could, while exposing their hypocrisy on some levels, is also not surprising and very human. People far and wide knew of the wonders of the Ming world and many wanted to experience them for themselves.

Most interesting perhaps is Wang's treatment of the intelligence-gathering aspects of these missions. It is taken for granted that diplomats in contemporary European courts were constantly spying upon and intriguing against one another. Yet we have surprisingly little scholarship on such activities in China beyond the advice of ancient military classics. So it is refreshing to see things from the other side, as the Chosôn monarchs were understandably interested in Chinese factional battles, military campaigns, and relations with other tributary states and envoys. It was apparently via such channels that envoys from Siam offered military help to the Ming in battling the Japanese in the 1590s when the latter invaded Korea. The Ming declined their request (to invade Japan) but made sure that they told the Koreans, implying that help was on the

way from multiple quarters in their efforts to bolster Korean morale while the Ming war machine mobilized. On the more personal level, the ability of these envoys from different lands to communicate in Classical Chinese is yet another manifestation of the overarching cultural influence of the Ming upon Asia.

Turning to the eunuchs themselves, their tenuous position within the diplomatic system is revealing of the Ming political structure itself. As Wang notes, eunuchs were often considered the personal slaves of the Ming emperors and being outside the regular bureaucracy, they could circumvent its many regulations and excessive paperwork. This made them ideal for facilitating personal missions and conveying oral edicts and the like. But, because they lacked official status and generally came from common backgrounds, they were distrusted and reviled by civil officials. These sentiments might be exacerbated in the case of Korean-born eunuchs, who could be regarded as Korean subjects of the king in certain conditions. This had the potential of creating diplomatic tensions between the Ming and the Chosôn court. On the other hand, the Korean rulers could capitalize on the intimate access the eunuchs had at the Ming court to ingratiate themselves with the ruler and certain powerful officials. Caught in the middle between the demands of two masters but also privy to much secret information, one can appreciate the precarious position of such officials. Thus, Wang's treatment provides a fascinating glimpse into the inner workings of one aspect of the tributary system.

Moving from the ritualistic and diplomatic to the commercial and military aspects of the tributary system, Masato Hasegawa examines relations literally on the ground, focusing on the Sino-Korean borderland around the time of the Great East Asian War of 1592–98. Like so many other studies in this volume, he underscores the differences between rhetoric and reality in Ming governmental policies while also stressing the tension between the state and commerce in the Sino-Korean border region. Merchants along the border had long engaged in commerce, despite official prohibitions. But in the war environment it became essential to facilitate the transportation of food and supplies so merchants, sometimes disguised as “soldiers and commoners” in the official records, were mobilized to aid the army. They were also instructed not to fleece or harm the locals, though there is ample evidence suggesting that such injunctions could not always be enforced. In any event, as Hasegawa shows, it proved difficult for the Ming state to mobilize enough merchants to supply the armies of the Sino-Korean allies, at least officially.

Hasegawa's astute analysis of the operation of trade markets for both military and private use during the war reveals the intimate relationship

between war and local society. The people and soldiers needed goods and supplies. The state needed tax revenue. Plus, the markets, by distributing food, supplies, and wealth, raised morale, thereby propping up the state. The markets also provided commercial opportunities for Chinese merchants, some of whom were connected to the most powerful Ming commanders. But over time the problems caused by the markets, at least from the perspective of the Korean court, exceeded their utility. But closing them could cause friction with China, which the Korean king was loath to do in light of the recent war.

This chapter therefore demonstrates how encompassing military and tributary relations really were in the Ming and how unofficial merchant networks came to play a key role in the Sino-Korean response to the Japanese threat. It also shows how the much-maligned tributary system was far more complex and flexible than has been realized until recently. The language used in official documents obscures realities on the ground. This realization encompasses Ming interactions with the outside world. Beneath the gilt and sometime bombastic surface lay a myriad of negotiated possibilities and alternative realities. But the benefits of interacting with the Ming and partaking of its culture, technology, and civilization were significant enough that many were willing to pay the price.

NOTE

- 1 On the concept of Zheng He Diplomacy, see Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes, eds., *Asia Looks Seaward: Power and Maritime Strategy* (New York: Praeger Security, 2007). Also see Hall's chapter below for a discussion of recent Chinese revisionist history concerning Zheng He.

CHAPTER 20

THE MING AS A EURASIAN POWER



Edward L. Farmer

As the last indigenous house to rule over the Han homeland the Ming Dynasty's position in the long duration of Chinese imperial history is both clear and distinct. The Ming's place in world history is far less so. The Chinese historiographical tradition that began with Sima Qian in the Han Dynasty created a sequential formula into which the histories of subsequent states and empires could be fitted. When Zhu Yuanzhang claimed the Mandate of Heaven, he assumed that his dynasty would be added to the long column of dynasties that had preceded it. He saw himself and his new state as the latest exemplars, the culmination even, of an age-old Chinese civilization. As soon as the Manchu Qing succeeded the Ming in 1644 they undertook to compile a conventional dynastic history that confirmed the Ming's place in the long column, while at the same time ensuring that the Ming was gone and could pose no threat to their own claim to the next position in line, though it is worth noting that the struggle to defeat the Ming remnants lasted some forty years and it took nearly a century to complete the official Ming history. World history has no such formula to offer us. To situate the Ming in a world history context we need to think of larger global

patterns independent of the dynastic succession in China. We need to think especially about the centrality of Eurasia and the connections between its various divisions.

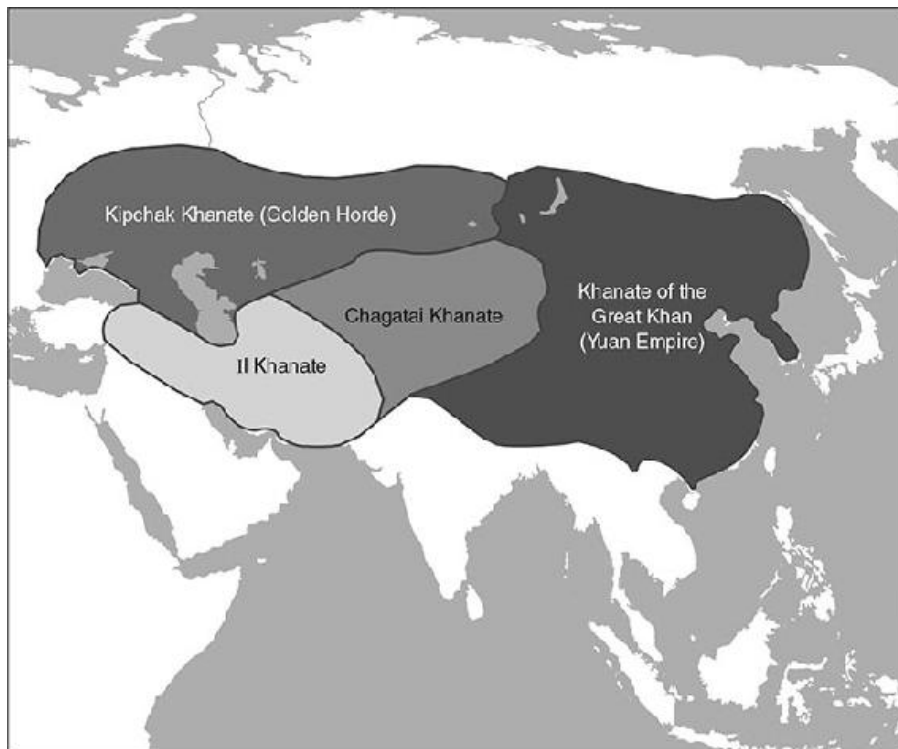
The Ming Empire occupied a position in Eurasia and the wider world that was both preeminent and full of contradictions. In an era of great Eurasian empires the Ming refused to participate in the imperial competition and yet, by not competing directly, emerged as the biggest winner. The Ming was the most populous, wealthiest, and potentially most powerful polity of its time, and yet it had quite limited contact with other empires in Eurasia. Ming emperors were aware of their contemporaries in South Asia, West Asia, and Europe but they were too far away to pose a direct threat to Ming security. We can find evidence of some “diplomatic” contacts but not of sustained relations or military confrontations between peers. In Iran, for example, excellent Ming porcelains from the imperial kilns were used by the Safavids to decorate the Ardabil Shrine, an important religious monument. These dated vessels are clear evidence of “tributary” exchanges between the Ming court and the Safavid rulers but they do not signal anything more substantial than symbolic contact.¹ Excellent Ming porcelains can also be seen in the Topkapi Palace Museum in Istanbul, formerly the residence of Ottoman rulers.² They testify to some kind of contact with Ming China, a long-distance exchange of gifts perhaps, but nothing more. In the case of the expanding European powers – the Portuguese, Spanish, and Dutch – contact with the Ming Empire was of a commercial and military nature, and did not involve the Ming court. How are we to make sense of this picture? How could the Ming be the greatest of the early modern empires, a major actor in the emerging world system, and at the same time the most remote and isolated? The answer to this question has two parts: the Ming imperial government played a minor role; Ming society, its economy and culture, played a major role.

EURASIAN ASCENDENCY

On a world history timeline the Ming falls in the early modern period, roughly the five centuries from 1300 to 1800. What sets the early modern period off from all history that went before, is the way the human populations of the various continents and islands came into contact with one another on a global basis. The early modern period was distinguished by this contact, by discoveries and exchanges of information, by migration, by trade and interactions of all kinds, including the emergence of a global trading network and the rise of the

system we call capitalism. Historians refer to this development as the “closure of the *ecumene*,” a bit of shop talk by which they mean the bringing into contact of all members of the human community.³ Global connection was one of the signal elements in the early modern era.

It is tempting to think about this early era of global contact as dating from the Columbian voyages, which began in 1492, because that year marked the beginning of sustained transatlantic relations. However, we cannot understand the early modern era clearly if we take 1492 as a starting point. Before the great age of European maritime expansion an earlier, land-based phase of connection was carried out by the Mongols, who set out from their homeland in Central Asia to conquer the known world. We need to see that earlier transcontinental effort to unify Eurasia as a first stage of what was a two-stage process, and to bear in mind that throughout the early modern period the post-Mongol empires across Asia were the largest, most populous, and wealthiest states in the world. This was true even as the European kingdoms expanded their participation in maritime commerce and extended territorial claims on other continents, first and most dramatically in the Americas. The earlier, Mongol-initiated, stage of the connection of the human community was not global in character since it affected only Eurasia. Nevertheless, the Mongol conquests strengthened contact and communication among the most populous regional cultures on earth, and helped to define the character of the early modern era. The Ming was a direct consequence of the Mongol expansion. It was one of a cohort of early modern empires formed in the wake of the Mongol collapse.

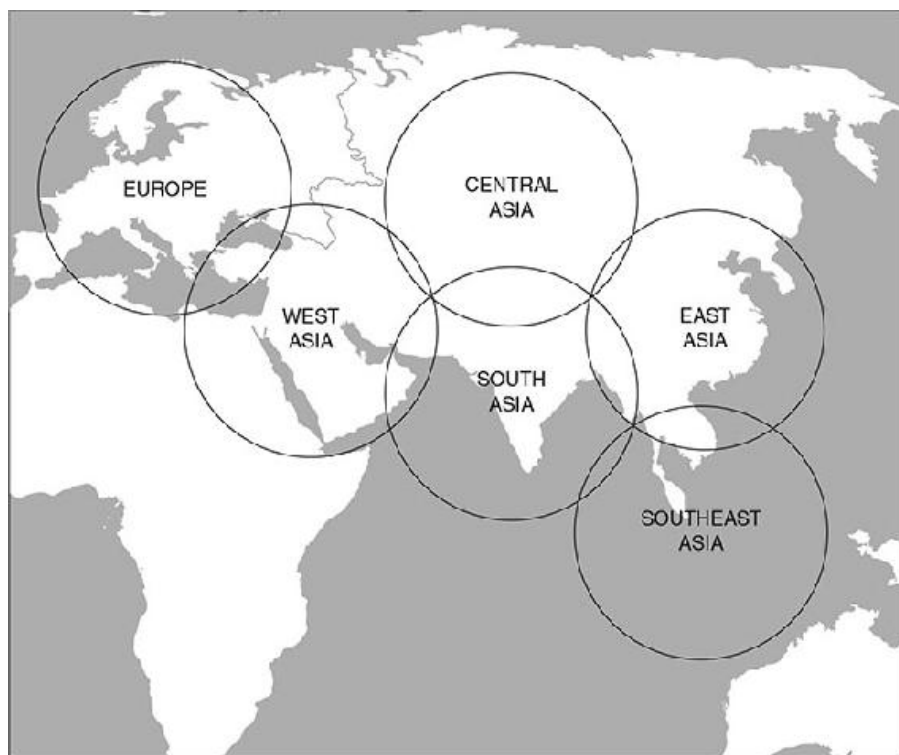


Map 20.1 The Mongol Empire

From our own time looking backward, it is easy to overstate the historical duration of the “West” and to lose sight of the earlier salience of Eurasia. The European powers, joined by the United States and Japan, achieved global hegemony only in the nineteenth century, marking the advent of a modern era. In the preceding early modern period, the still preindustrial European states, as their maritime power and influence increased, shared a loose global hegemony with the largely land-based empires of Asia. It was this set of early modern states, European and Asian, which accomplished the closure of the *ecumene* and knitted the world together. To understand the Ming’s global role we need to look at both stages of the closure of the *ecumene*, the land-based impact of the Mongol attempt to unify Eurasia, and the European linkage of the globe through maritime connections.

The Mongol expansion was set in motion by Temüjin (c. 1167–1227) who took the title Chinggis Khan (Oceanic Khan) with the stated intent to subdue the entire world. The wave of conquests he set in motion created the largest empire the world had seen, linked much of Eurasia, and stimulated trans-regional contacts of all sorts. In 1279, Temüjin’s grandson Khubilai completed the Mongol conquest of Song China and

became emperor of the Yuan Dynasty. The Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368) was the first time all of China was brought under alien rule, even as the greater empire fragmented into four separate portions (see Map 20.1). Mongol rule, religious toleration and protection of merchants created a brief *pax Mongolica* that facilitated travel, trade and the admixture of ethnic groups across the vast expanse of Eurasia. The accounts of Marco Polo and others who traveled through Mongol lands enhanced European understanding of developments in Asia. Close relations between Khubilai and his brother who ruled the khanate based in Persia facilitated the westward transmission of such Chinese technology and practices as printing and the distribution of agricultural handbooks. The Mongol episode left an enduring example of how to organize and rule an empire of great extent that combined different ethnic groups and spanned the ecological divide between pastoral steppe lands and settled agricultural communities. In the wake of the Mongol supremacy, empires arose across Eurasia, bringing a degree of unity to all of the regions except Europe and Southeast Asia, the two areas least affected by Mongol rule.



Map 20.2 Divisions of Eurasia

The most ambitious effort to repeat the Mongol feat was that of

Timur (1336–1405), known in Europe as Tamerlane, who briefly conquered much of Central Asia and West Asia, raided into India, and died while preparing to invade China, leaving a wide swath of destruction in his wake. Timur, whose ascendancy was based on military force, failed to create an enduring legacy. Other regional powers were more successful. In the early 1500s a group of Chagatay Turks from the region to the east of the Aral Sea, invaded South Asia and founded the Mughal (the name means “Mongol”) Empire that dominated India for more than two centuries. They created an ethnically and religiously complex regime, combining Muslim Turkish invaders with indigenous Hindu elites, in an expansive conquest enterprise of fabulous wealth that governed the second largest population in the world after Ming China. On their way to India, the Mughals passed through Iran and were deeply influenced by Persian cultural traditions. The South Asia they sought to unite and govern, much like the India of our own time, was marked by great linguistic and cultural diversity that made it resistant to the kind of centralized bureaucratic governance that was achieved in Ming China.

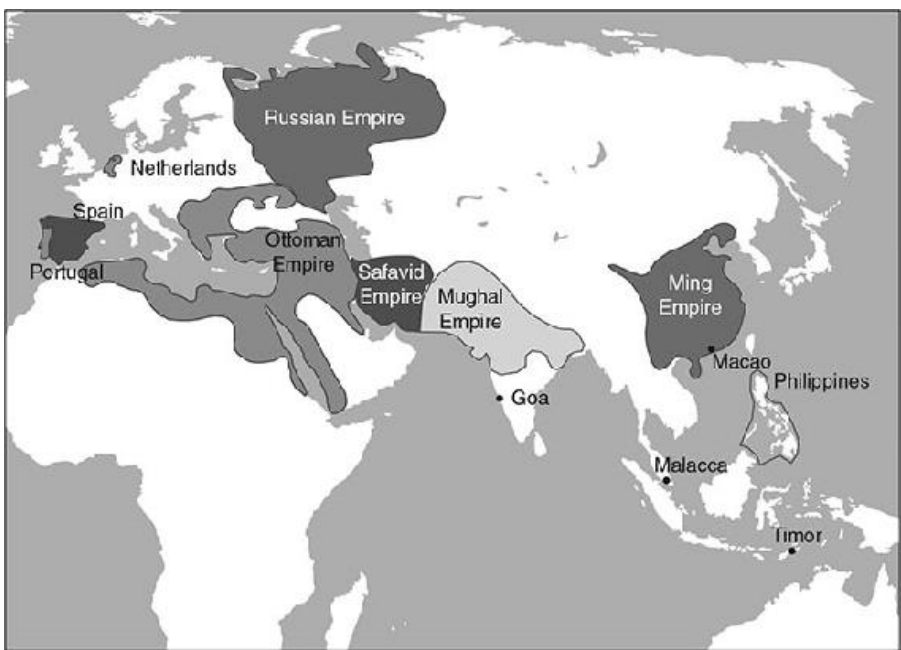
In the Iranian heartland to the west of India, in the early 1500s, Ismail, the militant and charismatic leader of the Safavia, an Islamic sect, proclaimed himself shah and proceeded to conquer the territory southwest of the Caspian Sea, taking Baghdad in 1508. During his rise, Ismail became the leader of a federation of Turkoman tribes, known as the Qizilbash or “Red Heads” for the distinctive turbans they wore. The Safavids were messianic champions of Shia Islam, a fact which put them in conflict with the Mughals to the east and Ottomans to the west. The Safavids controlled the Persian heartland, now modern Iran, and established Shia Islam in the region.

In the first half of the fifteenth century, in the wake of the collapse of Timur’s empire, a Turkish sultanate in western Anatolia (Asia Minor, now modern Turkey) expanded their territory until they became the dominant power in the eastern Mediterranean. They captured Constantinople (now Istanbul) in 1453 and made it the capital of the Ottoman Empire. Ottoman territory encompassed portions of Eastern Europe, Mesopotamia, and northern Africa. Its administration made use of the Turkish, Arabic, and Persian languages. Christian children were drafted from European lands, enslaved, converted to Islam and raised by Turkish families for Ottoman service as administrators and in elite (Janissary) military units. Ethnic minorities were organized into self-governing communities (milletts). The Ottoman ruler governed as a protector of the Muslim faith, meaning orthodox Sunni Islam, claiming the title of caliph. The Ottomans faced often hostile challenges from Christian powers in Europe and the Shiite Safavid regime to the east.

When the Kipchak Khanate (Khanate of the Golden Horde) collapsed, its territory was claimed by the Russian Tsar from his capital at Moscow. Over the course of the early modern and modern periods the Russian Empire expanded through conquest and settlement all the way to the Pacific Ocean, and even into North America. The Russian pattern of expansion, with settlers coming first followed by the extension of imperial administration, was similar to the southward expansion of the Chinese empire. Thanks to the Tsar's control of the official Orthodox Church, Russia constituted part of the Christian world and was culturally oriented toward Europe. The Tsar took the title of Caesar, claiming to be an heir to the Roman imperial tradition.

THE MING AS A POST-MONGOL EMPIRE

How did the Ming fit in to this cohort of post-Mongol empires? How did it compare to the other land-based empires just named? How did it interact with the European maritime empires when their agents reached East Asia? Of all the post-Mongol empires, the Ming was the most directly connected to Mongol rule in its origin, and the most ambivalent about expanding its territory through conquest. Ming military institutions were shaped to a large degree by Mongol precedents and many Mongols were settled in north China where many became integral parts of the armed forces.⁴ However, the Ming did not attempt to replicate the multi-ethnic achievements of the Mongols, as did the Mughul, Ottoman, and Tsarist regimes especially, nor did it come to power at the head of a mobilized tribal confederation as did the Safavids. Ming ambivalence about territorial expansion was acted out dramatically in the reigns of the founder and his fourth son, the Hongwu era (1368–98) and the Yongle era (1403–24) respectively.



Map 20.3 Post-Mongol Eurasian empires

The Ming founder, a poor peasant from the Chinese heartland, consciously repudiated territorial aggrandizement in favor of consolidation of an ethnically and culturally homogeneous homeland. He established his capital at Nanjing, in the heartland of Han China far from the Inner Asian frontier. As Map 20.3 shows clearly, an enormous region between the Russian Empire and the Ming remained unconsolidated. Over time the Russians and the Ming's successors the Manchus would see to it that all of those territories were annexed. After a delay of almost three centuries, the Manchus drew on the Mongol example to form a multi-cultural conquest empire that swallowed up all of Ming territory along with Tibet, eastern Turkistan, Mongolia, Manchuria, and Taiwan (which had effectively been occupied by Chinese subjects during the Ming).

The Ming founder chose not to emulate the Mongol pattern of conquest. Zhu Yuanzhang was so opposed to expansion and foreign wars that he specified in his Ancestral Instruction (*Huang Ming Zuxun*) that his successors were to avoid unnecessary military adventures. The fourth article states in part:

The barbarians roundabout are hemmed in by the mountains and the sea, isolated in out-of-the-way corners of the world. Although they have land, the land is insufficient; although they have people, the people are difficult to control. If they overestimate their own strength and come to harass our borders, it will be

inauspicious for them. As they are not a threat to China, should we rashly send forces to attack them, it will also be inauspicious for us. I fear that later generations of my offspring will rely on the wealth and power of China, and, coveting a momentary martial glory, will rally forces without provocation, at great cost in human life. Always remember that this is forbidden.⁵

THE YONGLE ERA

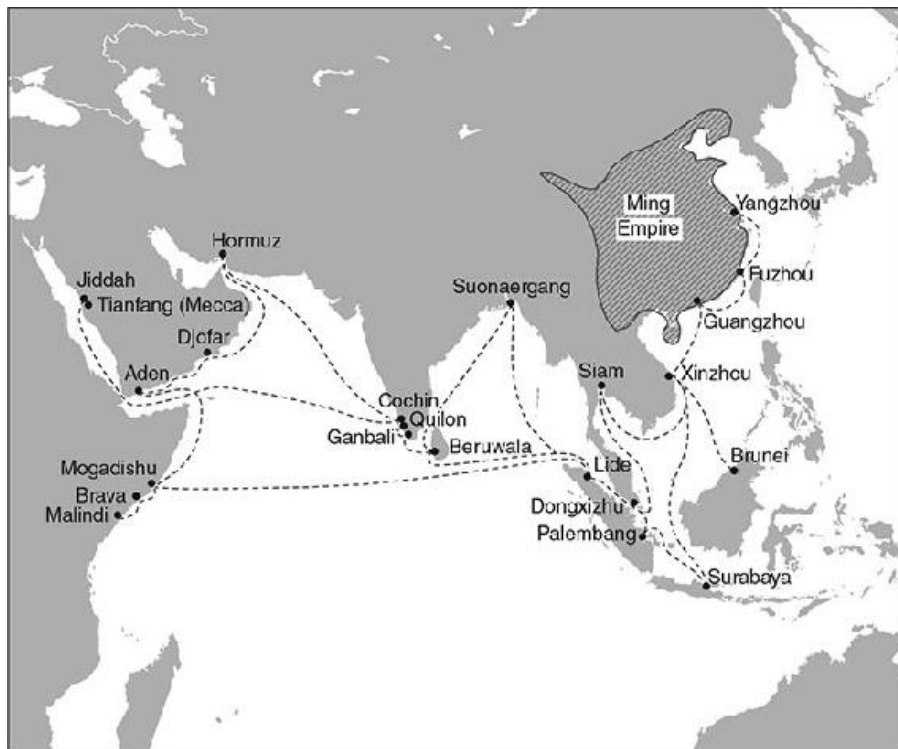
With one major exception, later Ming rulers for the most part heeded the wishes of the founder and avoided foreign adventures. Consequently, the Ming did not seek to expand its territory (with the notable exception of the southwest) nor did it seek to engage the other early modern empires militarily, except when explicitly challenged. Ming government was generally, though not always, informed by a parochial and isolationist Confucian ideology that looked for guidance in the historical precedents of earlier periods of Han rule. The relative contentment, passivity, and isolation of the Ming were the results of preference, not compulsion. It was, for the most part, an inward-looking agrarian state, efficiently administered by the world's most advanced bureaucracy.⁶ The Ming certainly had the capacity for bold, aggressive action. We know this thanks to the remarkable career of the third Ming emperor, Zhu Yuanzhang's fourth son, Zhu Di, who usurped the throne shortly after the founder died and launched a spectacular program of mobilization and outward expansion. His reign, the Yongle (Eternal Happiness) period, was the exception that proved the rule.

In the late 1300s, Zhu Di and other sons of the first emperor were assigned fiefs in the frontier regions. The goal was twofold: to create a protective screen of imperial princes across the north who could oversee military commanders assigned to guard against intrusions from Mongolia, and to remove junior princes from the capital so they could not interfere in government affairs. The weaknesses of this system were exposed when the oldest of the founder's sons, the crown prince, died and the line of succession passed to his eldest son, a nephew of the frontier princes. Zhu Di, the Prince of Yan whose fief was located in the former Yuan capital (now Beijing), revolted, marched south and seized the throne. From years in the north, leading troops in defensive maneuvers along the frontier, Zhu Di gained a keen awareness of the strategic importance of the border region and the danger of potential Mongol invasion. Once in power, he began to behave in an active and aggressive manner that went far beyond the defensive posture his father had stipulated. His military exploits were so dramatic that people struggled to account for his behavior. One fable speculated that he must have actually been of Mongol descent, perhaps born of a concubine

taken from the Yuan palace. This idea lacked plausibility because it would have required Zhu Di, who was born in 1370, to remain in utero for more than two years after Beijing fell to the Ming. In any case, he claimed to be the son of Empress Ma. Nevertheless, the fable underscores the extraordinary quality of his actions.

Zhu Di's most strategic act was to move the capital from Nanjing, south of the Yangzi River to Beijing, the site of the Yuan capital Dadu. The move to Beijing took twenty years. It entailed not just construction of a new city wall and palace complex, and northward transfer of thousands of civilian and military households, but also restoring the Grand Canal to transport grain and supplies to support the expanded population of the north. Zhu Di's motive in moving the capital was to shift the court and the center of government closer to the northern frontier so that he could directly oversee military operations. He was unwilling to rely on diplomacy, passive defense and payments to the northern tribesmen as the Song had done; he was determined to send Ming forces into the north to contest control of territory. To fight the nomads the Chinese needed horses, which were in short supply in the agricultural heartland. Zhu Di instituted a crash program to expand the number of horses by trading with northern peoples at tea-horse markets, by breeding new stock on civilian and military farms set up for the purpose, by requiring civilian households in the Beijing area to supply horses as part of their tax obligations, and by encouraging tributaries and visitors to bring horses with them whenever they entered Ming territory. The imperial court records over the Yongle reign show a growth in the number of mounts from just under 38,000 in 1403 to more than 1.5 million in 1423.⁷ After years spent building up Ming forces and systems of logistical support, the emperor personally led five major expeditions into Mongolia between 1410 and 1424. The largest of these efforts lasted for months and involved hundreds of thousands of men and animals. The emperor died in the field in 1424.

During his reign Zhu Di expanded Ming territory southward by mopping up pockets of former Yuan subjects who had not yet surrendered to the new dynasty, extending Ming administration into tribal areas, and establishing Guizhou as a province. In 1407 a Ming army invaded the tributary state of Annam, in what is now the northern part of Vietnam, and attached the country to the empire as the province of Jiaozhi.⁸



Map 20.4 Routes of Zheng He's voyages

Ming ambivalence about foreign contacts is most clearly revealed in maritime policy. Despite China's long history of maritime contacts with Southeast, South and West Asia the new Ming regime did little to promote overseas trading. As early as 1402 the court decreed a prohibition on maritime trade to prevent coastal people from going abroad and to discourage outsiders from coming to China. The prohibition decrees reveal the court's, or perhaps more accurately, a segment of high officialdom's, xenophobia as well as its disregard for the interests of its seafaring subjects. Nonetheless official isolationism did not prevent the government itself from participating in overseas trade and contacts. Zhu Di's most famous exercise of power was his initiative to send Ming maritime expeditions southward and westward through Southeast Asia to ports in South Asia, the Arabian Peninsula, and along the eastern coast of Africa. These expeditions were carried out under the command of the able and trusted eunuch Zheng He (see Map 20.4). Zheng He was born into a Muslim family in southwest China, in a community familiar with the route of the haj to Mecca. Six voyages were undertaken in the Yongle period between 1405 and 1422; a seventh, and final, voyage was launched after Zhu Di died. The voyages were carried out by fleets of vessels manned by as many as 27,000 men.

The biggest vessels, the largest wooden ships ever built, were essentially monstrous barges 440 feet long with nine masts, capable of carrying 500 men. The fleets, which carried soldiers and even some cavalry, engaged pirates, and in some cases local rulers, but their purpose was neither conquest nor the acquisition of territory. The central mission was diplomatic and political – the enhancement of Ming prestige through an extension of the tributary system to new lands. Wherever they landed the Ming envoys lavished gifts on the rulers and solicited “ambassadors” who were carried back to China to pay homage to the emperor. The ambassadors, in their turn, brought valuable items from their homelands to present at court. African giraffes, which the Chinese viewed as *qilin*, auspicious beasts, were particularly well received.

As Edward L. Dreyer noted, the purpose of the voyages was power projection, not territorial expansion. Zheng He used his formidable military forces to overawe, and if necessary to chastise, but not to conquer or annex territory.⁹ The fleet encountered communities of Chinese merchants and pirates residing and operating abroad in an illegal manner, most notably at Palembang in Sumatra, but made no effort to incorporate such elements into the empire. At the time of his last voyage in 1431 Zheng He left an inscription in the Temple of the Heavenly Princess whose protection made the expeditions successful. These lines suggest how the Chinese viewed their mission:

When we arrived at the foreign countries, barbarian kings who resisted transformation [by Chinese civilization] and were not respectful we captured alive, and bandit soldiers who looted and plundered recklessly we exterminated. Because of this the sea routes became pure and peaceful and the foreign peoples could rely upon them and pursue their occupations in safety. All of this was due to the aid of the goddess.¹⁰

The maritime voyages reveal both the capacity and the disposition of the Ming Empire. In the early years of the fifteenth century the Chinese state had the resources to launch these expeditions at the very same time it was engaged in reconstruction of the Grand Canal, erection of a new capital in Beijing, and prosecution of five major land campaigns in Mongolia. Chinese shipbuilding, navigation, and cartography surpassed that of any other culture at that time. The expeditions were not explorations: the Chinese were familiar with the sea lanes and coastal settlements as far west as Africa. And yet the Ming was uninterested in the acquisition of territory or the establishment of trading posts.

The Yongle Emperor’s expansion of Ming power ended with his death. After a final, seventh, voyage the maritime expeditions were abandoned, the fleet of great ships scuttled. Tributary relations

contracted once again to the nearby states specified in the founder's Ancestral Instruction. Maritime trade continued to grow throughout the fifteenth century but largely outside of the tributary system.¹¹ The new province of Jiaozhi proved ungovernable and reverted to tributary status as the independent state of Annam. Even the movement of the capital to Beijing was reconsidered. A return to Nanjing was ordered, but never carried out. In 1449, when the foolish and inexperienced Emperor Yingzong attempted to emulate Zhu Di's military exploits by leading an army into Mongolia, he was ignominiously defeated and captured.¹² Ming external policy returned to the modest defensive stance ordered by the founder.

MING MILITARY POWER

How would Ming military strength compare to that of other states across Eurasia? This is a difficult question to answer. After the expansive projects of the Yongle era and the humiliating fiasco of Yingzong's capture by the Mongols, Ming military policy was largely defensive. In later years the Ming revived and extended the network of defensive works known as the Great Wall.¹³ These were massive structures including not just walls, but watch towers, signal towers, forts, and walled cities. In sheer numbers the Ming military forces were larger, and probably better organized, trained and equipped than any other army in the world. They were defensively deployed and not used in wars of aggression against rival states. So we can only speculate about how Ming armies might have fared against the Mughals, the Safavids, or the Ottomans. These three states have long been labeled "gunpowder empires" and lumped together as a class. However, revisionist historians have recently amended this classification by noting that the Ming was the first true gunpowder empire.¹⁴ From the very beginning, Ming military forces included large numbers of troops with firearms. They also created sophisticated training programs for their soldiers. They employed a wide variety of small weapons designed to kill personnel, not the heavy, long guns we think of in later times. In Europe, heavy cannons were used to breach defensive walls, but in China, where walls were conventionally constructed of tamped earth several meters thick, European cannons would have been ineffective.

By late Ming times, Europeans had developed heavy guns and sailing ships that were superior to Chinese naval vessels in firepower and maneuverability. But China was too large, and too far away for the Europeans to project significant force against the Ming. They could occupy islands here and there, but not directly confront the

overwhelming power of the dynasty on the mainland. From the first maritime contacts in the 1500s it would take three centuries before the Europeans were capable of invading China. On their side, the Chinese were quick to adopt new military technology and began to cast high quality cannons before the end of the Ming period.¹⁵

The best test of Ming military power by an outside force came in the 1590s when Japan invaded Korea and Chinese forces were sent to aid the Koreans. Kenneth Swope has labeled this engagement, which lasted from 1592 to 1598, the “First Great East Asian War” and called it the “single largest military conflict in the world during the sixteenth century.”¹⁶ After a prolonged period of internal warfare Japanese society had achieved a high degree of militarization and mobilization. Upon consolidating control over warring parties the Japanese leader, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, turned to external conquest. His “glorious enterprise” aimed at the conquest of Korea, directly challenging Ming hegemony. Tens of thousands of Ming soldiers were dispatched to aid the Koreans. In the end, Japanese forces, which significantly outnumbered those of the Sino-Korean allies for much of the war, were defeated, reaffirming Ming dominance in the region. In this war with the Japanese the Ming enjoyed a decisive advantage in heavy weapons.¹⁷ In the subsequent war with the Manchus, the Ming enjoyed technological superiority initially, forcing the Manchus to adopt better gunpowder technology themselves and enlist the aid of both Chinese and Korean collaborators.

THE MING’S PLACE IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

Given that the Ming state was not anxious to promote contact with remote parts of the world or to extend its own power overseas how are we to assess the place of the Ming in the early modern world? The answer to this question is that Ming influence was exerted most strongly in social, economic, and cultural realms only tangentially subject to governmental attention and guidance. The power and dynamism of Ming society were felt around the globe thanks to the productivity and initiative of Ming subjects, not the policies of the imperial dynasty.

One manifestation of Ming influence, as discussed by Kenneth Hall in the present volume, was an outflow of emigrants seeking economic opportunities beyond the borders of the empire. Where this process took place on land, as Chinese farmers pushed to occupy arable land across the southern arc of the frontier, what has been called “China’s march toward the tropics,” the government did take notice and sent its agents along to regularize the process.¹⁸ Southward expansion of the agrarian economy was an ongoing phenomenon dating back to ancient times and

continued into the twentieth century. As Han Chinese farmers encroached on the homelands of indigenous peoples, conflicts and interactions ensued. Local peoples were brought into the imperial system by degrees, first as indigenous authorities (*tusi*), and then as regular tax-paying subjects of the realm. Where conflict was too intense the Ming authorities tried to limit contact, resorting in one instance to the erection of a “Southern Great Wall.”¹⁹ And while these regions are undeniably part of China today, in the Ming context this process of annexation, treated by Leo Shin herein, should be viewed as imperialism. Indeed, the succeeding Qing dynasty adopted many Ming practices in extending their formal control over the southwest and its peoples.

Where Ming subjects moved off by sea the authorities did not venture to follow. The fishermen, merchants, and pirates who sailed to Southeast Asia did so without imperial approval. In the eyes of the Ming state they were no longer imperial subjects, but criminals who forfeited any claim to protection from their country of origin. Here we see a contrast between Chinese and English law: the Chinese dismissed those who had left the homeland while the English viewed each person as an extension of the body of the king, worthy of protection. We should not adopt the official Ming view of the outflow by ignoring the movement of people but rather see it as the part of an outward movement of Chinese, energized not by governmental policy but by the initiatives of family and kinship units, to every corner of the globe. This was the emergence of “Greater China,” a global phenomenon that began well before the Ming and continues today. During the Ming, the largest numbers of emigrants went to areas close to the mainland: nearby islands and Southeast Asia. Merchants who went to the Philippines and farmers who settled in Taiwan came into contact with the expanding mercantile empires of the Western European kingdoms. Simply by following their own economic interests they played a significant role in early modern world history; they were the instruments through which the Ming economy interacted with the rising commercial networks of the Portuguese, Spanish, and Dutch.²⁰ In the middle of the seventeenth century, when the Chinese mainland fell to the invading Manchus, the island of Taiwan briefly provided support to Ming loyalist elements. Zheng Chenggong (discussed by Xing Hang herein) rallied the Han residents of Taiwan, expelled the Dutch from their outpost, Fort Zeelandia, near Tainan and resisted the Manchu Qing forces for decades before the island was taken and incorporated into the new empire.

The most powerful manifestation of Ming influence in the early modern world was economic. Without political authorization or programmatic guidance, starting in the fifteenth century and continuing until the end of the dynasty, commercial development and urbanization

transformed the lower Yangzi region and south China in ways that upset and perplexed many members of the scholar-official elite who still clung to the ideal of an agrarian social order. As the scale of commerce expanded, the Chinese economy came to play a central role in the global trade system created by European initiatives.

The Portuguese were pioneers in European maritime expansion. They led the way in the exploration of the coast of Africa, the discovery of a route around Africa to the Indian Ocean, and the circumnavigation of the globe. In the Indian Ocean they joined in an enormous world of maritime trade and contacts that had linked West, South, Southeast and East Asia for centuries, and encountered Chinese merchants and mariners who were well represented in this maritime world.²¹ The Portuguese were skilled fishermen and mariners but their population was too small to support large-scale colonization of the kind the Spanish undertook in America. Consequently, when the Portuguese expanded overseas, they established small, fortified trading outposts at strategic coastal locations in Africa and Asia. (Brazil is the notable exception to this pattern.) The most important Portuguese outposts in Asia were Goa (1510) on the western coast of the Indian subcontinent, Malacca (1511) on the Malay Peninsula, Macao (1555) on the southern coast of China, and Timor (1600) in the Indonesian archipelago. Local officials allowed the Portuguese to reside in Macao without the approval of the central government in Beijing. No other European nation was granted such a privilege during the Ming. The Portuguese traded profitably from Macao but their activities did not approach the level of trade the Spanish were able to conduct from Manila.

Shortly after Columbus's first voyage, Portuguese and Spanish rivalry for overseas expansion was adjudicated by the Pope in the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) which famously divided the world along an imaginary north-south line 370 leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands. Spain was granted everything west of the line and Portugal everything to the east. Initially the Portuguese got the better of this arrangement: access to the wealthy trading centers of Asia. The Spanish got claims in the Americas (minus Brazil), but the trading opportunities there were much more modest; colonization and long-term development were required. In the short term the Spanish produced sugar, plundered the indigenous civilizations and mined precious metals. In the longer term the Spanish, using Mexico as a base of operations, continued their westward expansion clear across the Pacific to the Philippines. Spanish efforts to gain a foothold on the Chinese mainland and on Taiwan were unsuccessful so they developed Manila as a trading port for Chinese goods. Merchants from southern China brought silk, porcelains, and other goods to Manila illegally where they were exchanged for Spanish

silver from Mexico. Spanish “Manila galleons” carried silver from Mexico to the Philippines, and returned stuffed with silk and other Chinese products for consumption in the Americas, and for transshipment to Spain and other parts of Europe. In this way, with no governmental initiative or involvement, a major channel was created for the flow of silver from mines in the Americas into the Ming economy. Silver also flowed into China through legal and illegal channels from Japan and from Europe, carried on Chinese, Japanese, Portuguese, and Dutch vessels.

Because other economies had little to offer that the Chinese desired to buy, foreign merchants were obliged to pay for superior Chinese products with silver. Throughout the early modern period, China enjoyed a strong net trade balance. The Chinese impact on the global economic system was so great that Andre Gunder Frank concludes “the entire world economic order was – literally – Sinocentric”.²² Internally, the net influx of silver had a major impact on the Ming economy. Corvée obligations, an important part of the tax obligations on commoner households, traditionally levied in the form of labor service, were converted to payment in silver.

CULTURAL INFLUENCE

Another manifestation of Ming global influence, one that defies quantification, was cultural. European interest in China was intense, widespread, and enduring. No sooner did the Portuguese establish a foothold at Malacca on the Malay Peninsula (1511) than they turned their attention to learning more about China. The first Portuguese embassy to China was dispatched in 1517 and reached Beijing in 1520, but was unable to gain an audience with the emperor. The Spanish also made unsuccessful attempts from their base in the Philippines to establish relations with the Ming government. In the early decades of contact with China, European knowledge was limited to what could be learned from the Japanese, from letters written by those who were taken prisoner in China, and by questioning merchants about their coastal contacts with China. The most important book on China published in the sixteenth century was a history written by the Spanish Augustinian monk Juan González de Mendoza in 1585. By the end of the century it had been translated into seven European languages and reprinted 46 times.²³

Europeans gained more substantial and accurate information about China at the turn of the seventeenth century, when missionaries were able to reside in China, to read Chinese texts, and to have prolonged

contact with educated Chinese. The result was the profound and substantial intellectual exchange between two literate cultures in the early modern era, one of the outstanding fruits of the closure of the *ecumene*. In this case, the Europeans did the heavy lifting. The Chinese were less interested and less eager to interact with foreigners than were their Western interlocutors. European missionaries, chiefly Jesuits, traveled to China and kept the best records of the cross-cultural contacts that were achieved. In the early modern period the predominant flow of cultural influence was from China to Europe. In the following modern period, the direction of the flow would be reversed.²⁴

The initiative for intellectual exchange between Europeans and Ming Chinese came from the European side as part of the Catholic Counterreformation. The Society of Jesus was formed in 1540. Its members were highly disciplined and well educated, and devoted much of their energy to overseas missionary work. Thanks to the papal grant of the right to promote the faith east of the line of demarcation in the Atlantic, Jesuit fathers made their way to East Asia on Portuguese ships. Their effort to convert the Chinese began in Macao where the Portuguese established a permanent presence beginning in the mid-1550s. After some initial false steps the Jesuits hit on the strategy of imitating the dress and lifestyle of Chinese officials and scholars, the educated elite of Ming society, with the aim of converting the Chinese from the top down. One consequence of this policy was the intimate contact and exchange of information and ideas, over many decades, between the best educated men from two literate civilizations. It was the most substantial intellectual encounter of the early modern period.

The Jesuit father whose career best exemplified the new strategy was Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), an Italian who arrived in Macao in 1582.²⁵ Ricci and his colleagues undertook intensive study of the Chinese language and the Confucian classical texts that were at the core of Chinese high culture. The Jesuits dressed in silk gowns like Chinese degree holders and associated with officials who helped them gain access to the capital in Beijing and win imperial permission to reside in China for life. Ricci, who had received an excellent education in Europe, was able to impress the Chinese with his knowledge of mathematics, astronomy, cartography (he published the first world map in Chinese), and mechanics. Thanks to their knowledge of astronomy, the Jesuits were appointed as astronomy officials because their understanding surpassed earlier work by the Chinese in accuracy.

The Jesuits proved useful to the Chinese court – improving the calendar and providing a variety of services – but they were ultimately able to convert only a small number of Chinese to Christianity. Ricci's

world map, essentially a Chinese translation of a European world map, with China tactfully placed in the center, was printed in large panels suitable for mounting on a folding screen. The map caught the fancy of educated Chinese. Many copies were printed and sold, indicating some degree of interest in new knowledge from Europe. But we have no evidence of a generalized mania for things European to match the popularity of silks, porcelains, hand-painted wallpaper, and Chinese-style gardens in western countries.

During their decades in China, Jesuit fathers served as conduits for the exchange of information and opinions between China and Europe. Their primary mission in China was religious proselytizing and the conversion of the Chinese to Christianity. Their reports about China, however, covered a wide range of subjects, including natural history, literature, astronomy, mathematics, philosophy, social conditions, and cultural practices, to name a few. This information was widely circulated in Europe and was welcomed by scholars who were busy cataloguing and analyzing information from all parts of the globe. Europeans were quite naturally interested in Ming China, the most populous and economically developed society they encountered in their exploits around the globe. Some authors were impressed with the way the Ming Empire was governed and suggested that Europeans could learn something from what appeared to be exemplary practices. Well before the end of the Ming, the Italian man of letters, Ludovico Arrivabene (c. 1530–c.1579), in his *Istoria della China* (1599 reissue of *Il magno Vitei*) celebrated China as a model state.²⁶ The Jesuit-educated priest Giovanni Botero (1544–1617) was more explicit in his praise. He credited the Chinese rulers with great prudence for preserving their own society, forbidding their subjects to go abroad, giving up any idea of expanding their territory, and even prohibiting the ruler from engaging wars of conquest.²⁷

Admiration for China was shared by the French essayist Michel de Montaigne (1533–92) who took a broad view of human history and saw China as a model from which Europeans might learn. Indeed, Donald Lach notes that the French, who had the least direct contact with Ming China, expressed the greatest admiration. The notion that China was a peaceful society with a secular political order would come to play a role in the enlightenment discourses of the eighteenth century. How important the Chinese counterexample was to Europeans seeking to challenge their own traditional order, we cannot say. Nor can we easily determine with any precision how distorted or idealized their impressions of China were. But we can say that in the early modern era, the greatness of the Ming was recognized and celebrated at the western end of the Eurasian landmass.

NOTES

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CHAPTER 21

CONTESTED HISTORIES OF MING AGENCY IN THE JAVA SEA, STRAITS OF MELAKA, AND BAY OF BENGAL REGION



Kenneth R. Hall

Past Indian Ocean scholarship, focusing on the Ming era, has been prejudicial to the China to South India to Middle East passageway of the Indian Ocean trade, with little substantive evidence documenting the details of the Bay of Bengal, Straits of Melaka, and Java Sea passageway between eastern India and China. Clearly the Southeast Asian region was a major landfall on the pre-sixteenth-century international East–West maritime route connecting the Middle East and China, by way of India, as documented most notably in archeological recoveries of shipwreck cargoes and contemporary ceramic production sites in Vietnam and Thailand. Recent scholarship focus on the Ming trade has specifically addressed the Southeast Asia engagements of Chinese maritime diaspora.¹ In doing so revisionists have focused on Ming encounters with resident maritime trade communities in Southeast Asia as they have re-conceptualized the maritime network itself, breaking free from the prejudicial scholarly focus dominating Indian, Chinese, and the

Middle Eastern marketplaces and agencies that has constrained prior studies. Today international maritime trade and transit from the South Asian shoreline of the Bay of Bengal to the South China and Java Sea is conceived to have temporarily produced an inclusive extended eastern Indian Ocean borderless zone of contact before European presence became a factor, in a period often dated from the fall of Melaka to the Portuguese in 1511.

REDEFINING BOUNDARIES AND TRACING NETWORKS

Since World War II, Western scholars have tended to think in terms of modern political entities rather than regional communication networks. The point here is that historians must rethink our sense of boundaries to reach a new understanding of the international maritime trade. That is, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Malaysia, among others, are modern polities that are legacies of colonial-era divisions that encompassed heterogeneous populations. Southeast Asia is by nature an area of few physical or human boundaries; population clusters are normally separated by considerable space. There are rarely contiguous borders in a region that was historically under-populated and political power was marked not by control of geographical space, but by the number of people a ruler could depend upon to remain loyal and who would share their resources for the common good. Thus, cultural crossovers were common, and newcomers were welcomed as a new human resource rather than a liability.

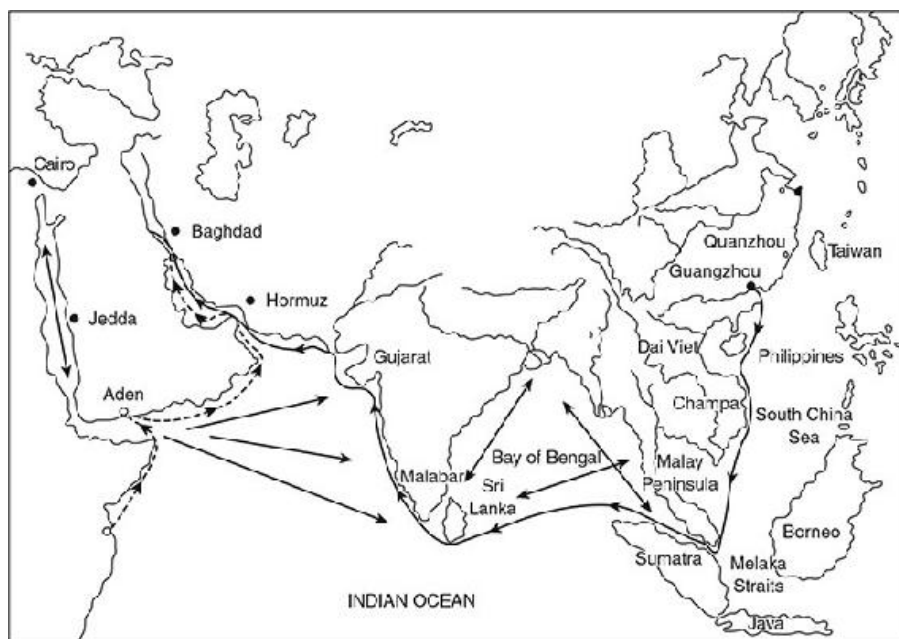
This fluidity differs from Chinese traditional history that is concerned with the political consequences of overpopulation, and the administration of populations who reside within the inclusive boundaries of the Chinese state. By necessity, a new dynasty had to reconquer the “rightful” Chinese territory, to fulfill Confucian expectations of those who claimed imperial authority. In contrast, Southeast Asia’s polities were relatively open, people-centered realms in which non-contiguous population clusters were afforded some degree of autonomy, including, if they wished, the opportunity to participate in external commercial and cultural networks. Appropriately, local clusters welcomed the periodic influx of new resident “foreigners,” who became community resources but also brought their own cultural practices.²

These new cultural practices might stimulate local cultural change, not due to the imposition by a stranger, but by a localization in which the resident community decided that the new cultural practices, whether as

they were presented or with some local modifications as appropriate to indigenous needs, had value. Internally, such localizations might involve highland–lowland and upstream–downstream migrations. Externally, this cultural networking resulted from Southeast Asia’s prominent position in the maritime trade routes, which provided the double potential for cultural interactions between locals and the East-West international trade route sojourners, as well as with Southeast Asia’s own assorted seagoing populations.³ There were also opportunities for overland communication, as for example the longstanding networking and mobility of populations and commodities between mainland Southeast Asia and the Yunnan region of southern China. This overland trade was based on the commercial exchange of horses, cowrie shells, and silver bullion and coinage. This region’s Hindu and Buddhist temples also supported the flow of pilgrims between South Asia and China.⁴

Historians’ longstanding disregard for Southeast Asia in discussions of the Indian Ocean trade is in part a product of the view initially argued and then retracted by the Southeast Asia specialist O. W. Wolters.⁵ He contended that the entry and residency of foreign merchants in the early Southeast Asian region was cyclical and tied to the opening and closing of China’s ports, or responded to political factors on the western and eastern ends of the international maritime route. In Wolters’ early view local Southeast Asian port-polities competed among themselves to attract Chinese recognition of their sovereignty and thereby assume the right to promote themselves as China’s trade intermediary or gateway. The problem with this vision, as Wolters later recognized, was that this reconstruction was not always based on historical reality, but existed only in the minds of the Chinese. His early thesis was incorrect extrapolation from the Chinese evidence, which was, after all, an interpretation of history from the Chinese worldview, and was intended for an aristocratic Chinese audience. That is, the Chinese may have needed to bestow their own sense of legitimacy upon a Southeast Asian port-polity to confirm their own perception of their relationship with the South.⁶ Such a view assumes that the maritime route depended on the marketplaces on the route’s ends – in China, South Asia, and the Middle East. That is, civilizations at either end of the route offered sufficient commercial potential to encourage trade (see Map 21.1). In the reverse, if the marketplaces at either end closed, then international traders had no reason to make the maritime passage, regions that lay between suffered accordingly, and the resulting economic recession caused the fall of existing polities that heavily depended on the trade-engendered revenues. New polities rose when the route’s ends again offered stable markets for the assorted trade goods.

Wolters also cautioned that one needs to be careful using the Ming-era sources, in which there was regular embellishment of accounts that had their origin in earlier Chinese dynastic texts. The Chinese sources regularly added elaborations or reinterpretations of prior dynastic accounts relative to their own era's prevailing historical "truth." Wolters asserted the need to carefully scrutinize the Chinese sources as they overlapped Southeast Asian sources. Dependency on a mixture of Chinese and contemporary external regional sources placed emphasis on Chinese agency rather than the reality of a "melting pot" marketplace. Emphasis on external agencies as the critical motors for change in Southeast Asia failed to recognize localizations in the development of marketplaces and civilizations within the region that lay not at the ends of the route but along the route. This obscured local capacity for cultural creativity as well as their role as major consumers. One may alternatively argue, as for example in the cases of the Bay of Bengal, South China Sea, Java Sea, and eastern Indonesian archipelago regional networks, that once set in motion the various Southeast Asian centers of trade and their adjacent civilizations became so trade-centered that they could sustain an international route even without the major consumer markets on its eastern or western ends.⁷



Map 2.1.1 Middle East to China: The Maritime Silk Road, ca. 800–1500

SOJOURNING AND RESIDENTIAL TRADE COMMUNITIES

Scholars have assumed that merchants flocked to the international Indian Ocean maritime route in good times, because a market upswing increased their likelihood of profit.⁸ That is, traders would risk the uncertain voyages because they seemed assured of a significant material return for their initiatives and efforts. However, is there equal possibility that traders' willingness to venture overseas was induced by a depressed market in their homeland, and that their entrepreneurial initiatives were the consequence of the unglamorous necessity of seeking a living elsewhere? Southeast Asia's developing civilizations and their marketplaces certainly offered them an attractive alternative.⁹ Even the old view that there was an ebb and flow in the volume of trade at China's ports that resulted from dynastic transitions and changing government attitudes toward trade and traders has been challenged by historians who specialize in Chinese history, who question whether there were really significant periodic declines in trade volume, and that actual practice was quite different from the rhetoric in the official state documents.¹⁰ The increasing presence of foreign merchants and others in Southeast Asia, while in part the consequence of an expansive international marketplace, must also be considered as consequential to economic or political failures in their homeland. For example, in the era of the Mongol conquests numerous populations responded by moving to more secure regions. Thus, numerous professionals from the Persian realms of modern Iran became residents of South Asia and the regions beyond during the thirteenth century, as Persia-based merchants had relocated or converted to Islam when the Persian Empire fell to Islamic armies in the seventh century.¹¹ Similarly following the collapse of the Gupta realm in the late sixth century, as also after the fall of northern India to Muslim warriors in the eleventh century, numerous Hindu and Buddhist clerics found alternative employment in the service of south India's kings and the courts of Southeast Asia's rulers..¹² Islam's spread in Southeast Asia, the entry of the earliest Muslim clerics, including Java's *wali sangha*, and the increasing residency of sojourners with Middle Eastern roots was coincidental to the fall of the Abbasids in the Middle East and the periodic upheaval during the Delhi Sultanate-era in twelfth- through sixteenth-century northern India.¹³ Migrations of Chinese merchants into Southeast Asia were initially encouraged when Chinese officials in the Song era, to secure more product volume from the regions to the south for domestic consumption as well as to enhance their tax revenues, relaxed their previous travel restrictions on the Chinese merchant community.

As discussed above, the existing network of overseas-based traders was not supplying sufficient commodity volume at the Chinese ports, and sending Chinese merchants out, negating prior restrictions on their sojourning, was a means to acquire additional tariff revenues, as well as to supply the Chinese aristocracy with the foreign commodities that were necessary for their ritual performances and conspicuous public displays of wealth.¹⁴ But it is equally reasonable that, as in later eras, sojourning was a means by which southern Chinese sought income that could sustain themselves and their families in desperate times whether economically, politically, or culturally challenging, and migration to the South was a logical option.¹⁵ Thus the greatest eras of Chinese migration into Southeast Asia and the establishment of Chinese communities corresponded to the bad times and public disorders associated with declining or failed dynasties, as for example the fall of the Song and the rise of the Yuan, or the fall of the Yuan and the rise of the Ming.¹⁶

Southeast Asia's role as a trade intermediary on the international route implies the periodic residence of traders and seagoing groups, who had to make stopovers along the international route to wait for a transition in the wind patterns that would allow them to return to their home ports. That is, as noted above, by at least the eleventh century sailors and traders rarely made the entire East–West passage, but only specialized in one portion of the route, and transferred their goods to and interacted with merchants and sojourners from other sectors of the route in a Southeast Asian port-polity. Southeast Asia's port-polity populations were thus in a constant state of flux, based on the wind patterns as well as the local market's potential as a source of international goods and/or local products. One population might replace another when the ships arrived from another segment of the international passage, normally after the prior group of transitory residents had embarked. Thus, historians have been reluctant to judge Southeast Asian port-polities as legitimate cities, on the grounds that they might only temporarily have a large resident population, but were more frequently the homes to only a small number of year-round occupants.¹⁷ And even these “permanent” residents might make frequent passage between the port-polity and its domestic hinterland, as wholesalers or as petty traders who exchanged the products of the port for domestic production and manufactures in well-developed and hierarchical indigenous marketing systems.¹⁸ As noted above, Southeast Asia was widely regarded to be an important source of commodities, those of China and the West, as well as its own spices, exotic jungle products (e.g. rhinoceros horn – a desired aphrodisiac, sandalwood, and tropical birds), and metals – variously tin, silver, and gold. But to focus

exclusively on the international trade ignores the developing hinterland market networks that supplied these products to the ports, as well as the indigenous demand for imported commodities – notably iron (most of this region had an inadequate iron supply),¹⁹ and textiles (especially Indian cottons produced in the Gujarat region of west India and in the weaving centers of India's southeast coast), Chinese ceramics, and, in the time of the early Islamic conversions, tombstones that were imported from Gujarat.²⁰ The Southeast Asian marketplace was important enough that Indian textiles were manufactured to Southeast Asian specifications, as for example the long pieces of ritual cloth that Gujarat weavers produced to the specifications (size and design) of the Toraja society of the eastern Indonesian archipelago.²¹ Java's marketplace was sustained by a realm-wide monetary system that was in place by the thirteenth century, and value was figured in monetary terms rather than in reference to the bulk of a commodity.²²

What, then, were the characteristics of the trade and traders who participated in the Southeast Asian portion of the early international maritime route? We may conceive of sojourning traders as members of fluid communities. Because of their varying transitory regional stopovers the maritime traders were members of communities in motion, who individually or in groups were forced to continually re-conceptualize themselves relative to what and who they represented and ever-changing circumstances. Those who became local residents, if only for a short time, had to make the best of the circumstances in a setting in which there was an ongoing process of creativity and negotiation of identity.²³

Membership in Southeast Asia's coastal communities was open to those who would risk the voyages and hardships of living in a foreign environment with limited cultural amenities. International seafarers had to accept their place in or among communities that consisted of their fellow transients and resident commercial specialists, or combinations of commercial specialists and other local residents. Community membership could be assigned by the itinerant merchants themselves, resident merchants, or by the indigenous elite.²⁴

MING SOUTH CHINA SEA AND INDIAN OCEAN ENGAGEMENTS

Based on the cited Southeast Asia evidence, one may speculate that the late thirteenth through early fifteenth-century Chinese diplomatic presence in the region was not intended to solicit trade or stabilize the Southern Seas maritime passageway because of a generalized decline in

the maritime trade route and the consequent decrease in volume of international commerce in China's ports. Instead, a variety of Southeast Asia evidence documents the rise of multiple regional marketplaces, the importance in that era of Southeast Asia's products – notably its spices, and the significant increase in domestic consumption of international products, as these lead to the conclusion that China's ports had become less important as destination marketplaces for the maritime sojourners. Thus, Yuan and Ming court maritime initiatives may be seen as reactive not to a generalized decline of the Asian maritime trade, but due to China's concern that it was becoming a peripheral player in the maritime marketplace network. Therein Chinese courts attempted to recover some of the lost trade volume, to promote China's own exports, to guarantee China's access to the best international products, and as well to reassert China's political interests in the region.²⁵

In the fifteenth century, Melaka rose and provided a singular entrepot at the intersection of the Bay of Bengal, South China Sea, and Java Sea regional networks. The Ming supported the founding of Melaka, and the voyages of the Ming eunuch Zheng He reflect their attempt to assert and revitalize the Tang-era China-centered tributary trade system.²⁶ However, Ming initiatives ultimately failed, not just because of debate within China itself relative to China's maritime engagements, but because the old tributary system was no longer valid. Despite what many historians have proposed, China could no longer “rule the seas,” even though they could send out fleets that included one-thousand-ton junks. The Ming maritime initiatives were an attempt to reassert an idealized sense of the Chinese past in much the same way that Chinese dynasties repeatedly tried to conquer what they assumed to be the natural region of Chinese authority, as notably reflected in the recurring and failed attempts of new Chinese dynasties to reassert China's authority over Vietnam from the eleventh century on.²⁷ Instead, Melaka's rise to prominence by the fifteenth century depended on the complexity of the multi-centered trade in the Indian Ocean, and the practicality at that time of establishing a single Southeast Asian entrepot as the clearinghouse for Indian Ocean trade. In essence, it was appropriate that this central entrepot was in Southeast Asia, because Southeast Asia was then the pivotal center of Asian trade, as the source of the most demanded commodities; the most important consumer marketplace for imported textiles and ceramics; and the common center for the exchange of the variety of commodities that derived from China, South Asia, and the Middle East, as well as other secondary sources of supply.

While Ming China may have discouraged official tributary trade with the South after the 1430s, there was still an ample, unofficial, and

privately financed trade conducted by junks. It carried large quantities of raw and woven silks, damask, satin and brocade, porcelain and pottery, musk, camphor, and pearls, as well as the less valuable alum, saltpeter, sulphur, copper, iron, and copper and iron utensils. Regular shipping also came from Thailand, Vietnam, Japan, and the Philippines, which contributed foodstuffs, jungle goods, and a variety of other trade items.²⁸

The Ming-era south China Muslim community is foundational to the understanding of Zheng He, a member of this south China Muslim community, who was widely respected, and even deified as a Chinese hero in the Ming era rather than being dismissed as a member of a Hakka Muslim diasporic community. Chinese revisionist scholars have used the example of Zheng He to counter previous scholarship among Western and Chinese scholars that has been reluctant to accept south China's Hui Muslims as examples of Han pluralism, as also lingering perceptions and official state policies relative to the overseas Chinese resident in Southeast Asia.

In a 2004 survey, Wan Ming highlighted the revisionist Chinese view that Zheng He and his voyages were attempts to pacify the Indian Ocean and to “unify the world” community (see [Figure 21.1](#)).²⁹ As evidence, Wan Ming cited the Chinese maps of that era that provide a comprehensive view of a unified world (*hunyi*), and contemporary efforts by the Ming to accomplish the “Great Han Restoration.” He offers a representative fifteenth-century popular poem that compares Zheng He's voyages to Zhang Qian's legendary journey to the West in the Han era, with the similar intent to prepare for regional peace and order. In this revisionist view the Ming had no territorial ambitions, nor was the primary purpose of the Zheng He voyages to secure Ming political hegemony under the revitalized tributary system, or to force regional port-polities to send their most valuable products to China's court. Rather than resulting in China's supremacy politically, economically, or culturally, as a consequence of China's superior military capacities, instead the “neglected view” of the Ming maritime assertions is that Zheng He's voyages stimulated subsequent regional development, because they established and preserved regional order against rampant piracy, and were foundational to the rise of new centralized regional political regimes that emerged during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.³⁰

Above all, Zheng He's expeditions “brought together myriad countries” into a “global” political and economic order, subject to Chinese restraints, that defined a new Indian Ocean community.³² Common to the Han and Tang legacies, the Ming “promoted virtue to

the four seas.” Additionally, Zheng He’s voyages are now found to “prepare conditions for internal social transformations in China,” and a “transfer of the overseas trade to the Chinese people.”³³ Zheng He’s voyages are also seen by Chinese revisionists as establishing the possibility of peaceful migration to and settlement in Southeast Asia. China’s populations thereby had the opportunity to improve their socioeconomic possibilities beyond the political boundaries of China. Subsequent peaceful migrations and settlement in Southeast Asia contributed to regional development of pluralistic communities. This contrasts with conflict between the later Chinese immigrants and local societies that were by-products of Western imperialism.³⁴

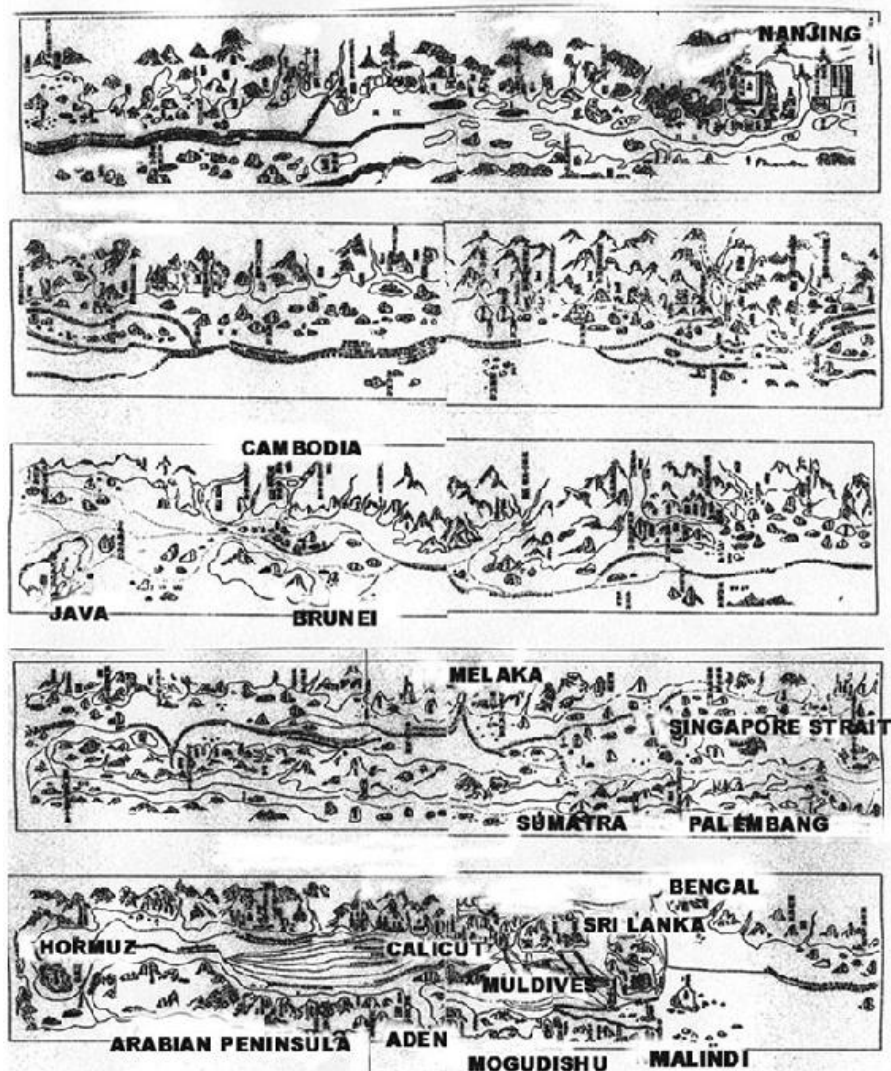


Figure 2.1.1 A reconstructed sea chart of Zheng He's maritime route in Mao Yuanyi's 茅元儀 Treatise of Military Preparations (Wubei zhi 武備志) (c. 1621)³¹

MING TRIBUTARY TRADE AND CHINESE MARITIME DIASPORA IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Ming dynastic policies had a substantial impact on the character and development of diaspora communities in fifteenth-century Asia. In contrast to the earlier Song and Yuan eras, when the reigning dynasties encouraged China-based traders to pursue trade in the maritime regions to China's south, the Ming initially restricted overseas trade by Chinese based in south China's ports, and instead solicited Indian Ocean-based Chinese and non-Chinese traders to provide its markets with the luxury goods consumed by China's elite. This was formalized under the tributary trade system, which China's rulers had traditionally employed as the basis of their diplomatic exchanges with Indian Ocean polities. Foreign regions desiring a trade relationship with China regularly sent tributary missions to present samples of the commodities available at their ports, to which the Chinese court might reciprocate by granting them favorable trade privileges. As reported in the Chinese dynastic records, local rulers commonly employed international traders from a variety of ethnicities other than their own to accompany or even lead their tributary missions. It would seem that in the local authorities' minds these international sojourners could better represent their port's commercial possibilities to the Chinese officials, due to their ability to provide favorable neutral "outsider" accounts. In return, the diplomatic "envoys" gained legitimate access to the China marketplace, where they might transact their own trade.

In the early fifteenth century, the Ming court favored tributary mission representation by overseas Chinese, who had for various reasons (e.g. due to poverty, domestic violence, and personal ambition) established residencies in Southeast Asian ports during the pre-Ming era. This pattern is clear in the Ming era accounting of the tributary missions received from Southeast Asian countries, which regularly included Chinese "envoys" and "translators." Ming policy and the early court's active solicitation of tributary missions had consequence among the overseas Chinese communities, as it encouraged if not expected them to maintain their Chinese identities, as also their loyalty to the Ming court.³⁵

Post-1430, when the voyages of the Ming fleet ended, coincident to

the relocation of the Ming capital to Beijing in China's north, the Ming revised their tributary trade policies. Southeast Asians wanted to continue the tributary trade, not only because it reinforced their local port's exchanges with China, but also because their tributary trade expeditions offered the opportunity for those who accompanied the missions to transact their own profitable private trade, whether on their own or their ruler's behalf.³⁶ By the 1440s, Chinese officials began to limit the number of these missions and their size. In 1453, for example, Java's court was told to send only one mission every three years instead of annually, and without the 200–300-person entourage that normally accompanied Java's tributary mission. The Ming officials made the case that these tributary missions had become overly expensive and purposeless rituals.

In response, ethnically Chinese overseas-residents who had previously facilitated the tributary trade began to regionally network from their local bases, and began to take local names as symbolic of their local affiliation. For example, during the fifteenth century numbers of the Chinese overseas diaspora settled in prosperous north Java ports where they became preeminent. This is demonstrated also in Ma Huan's description of the early fifteenth-century port community of Gresik:

From [Tuban, which is settled by non-Chinese] . . . you reach New Village, of which the foreign name is [Gresik] . . . [where] people from the Central Country came . . . and established themselves . . . ; right down to the present day the ruler of the [port] is a man from Kuangtung [province]. There are something more than a thousand families [here] . . . [also at Surabaya] there are a thousand families of foreigners, [the most prominent of which] are people from the Central Country.³⁷

Those inhabiting fifteenth-century Java coast ports who were not already Muslims, whether Chinese or other foreigners, converted to Islam, took local wives, and in other ways acculturated themselves into Javanese life. The most prominent example is that of the sojourner Raden Patah, "the visitor," who was born at Palembang, Sumatra to a Chinese woman with bloodlines to the Javanese royal lineage, and would eventually settle in Demak, where he converted to Islam and became this port-polity's first sultan. Under his leadership Demak would emerge from among its competitors to become the ritual center of Java's early Islamic community.³⁸

At the time the first Europeans arrived in the early sixteenth century, they made no mention of the existence of uniquely Chinese ethnic communities – except in the case of Melaka, where Chinese residents might disguise their contacts with China as extensions of their coastal trading down the Vietnam coastline. The Portuguese scribe Tome Pires

references the long-term presence of those of Chinese heritage in Java's ports, where he acknowledges that the local port elite were descended from Chinese, but whom he did not consider to be the leaders of separate Chinese communities.³⁹ In contrast, he and other early Spanish observers cited southern Luzon in the Philippines and the Brunei region of west coast Borneo as having resident Chinese and mestizo mixed Chinese and Filipino ethnic communities, who were based in local port-polities that were regularly trading with China.⁴⁰

In the 1560s, the Ming rulers reversed their prior restrictions on overseas trade. Licensed Chinese junks again sailed directly to Southeast Asia's ports.⁴¹ By the time the Dutch arrived at the end of the century they encountered very different Chinese communities than the Portuguese had a century before, as resident Chinese were distinguished by the new European visitors as distinct communities rather than integrated with local ethnicities. The Dutch allied with these Chinese communities against the multi-ethnic traders who had previously dominated Java's coastal trade.⁴² In the Philippines, too, the Spanish encouraged newly arrived Chinese to convert to Christianity as the foundation for their lucrative Spanish partnership, and drew distinction between these Chinese Christians and the old Sino-Filipino mestizo community that had been previously prominent.⁴³ Another consequence of the post-1430s Ming restrictions on China's overseas trade, and these integrations of the Chinese diaspora with local societies, was a transition in regional trade from a luxury-based trade centered on the Chinese marketplace to a regional network that depended on a bulk trade in foodstuffs and in items of common usage, such as cloth, pepper, and pottery. As the Chinese marketplace became less important after the 1430s, and an intra-Asian trade developed as the alternative, Melaka became the critical center for the exchange of the assortment of specialty products.⁴⁴

According to the Ming records of their late fourteenth- and fifteenth-century contacts with Southeast Asia, overseas Chinese communities resident in Southeast Asia consisted of combinations of full-time residents as well as Chinese sojourners whose voyages coordinated with Southeast Asia's seasonal monsoons. In 1400 there were documented Chinese resident communities at Manila in the Philippines, Java's north coast ports-of-trade, Brunei in Borneo, Ayutthaya in Siam, Champa in Vietnam, Melaka, and the ports of Sumatra's east coast.⁴⁵ Ming dynastic records record the Southeast Asian tributary missions to the Chinese court that regularly employed overseas Chinese (see [Table 21.1](#)). For example, the Siam envoy of 1497 was noted to have originally come from Fujian, and the interpreter who accompanied him had originally lived in Jiangxi.

Table 21.1 Tribute missions to China, 1370–1500

Year/States	Cambodia	Champa	Java	Melaka	Palembang	Siam	Sumatra
1370–79	3	9	7		7	15	
1380–89	6	9	2			12	
1390–99	1	3	1			9	
1400–09	3	6	11	1	3	10	2
1410–19	3	7	7	7	1	6	7
1420–29		7	14	4	1	9	2
1430–39		10	7	4		6	2
1440–49		10	5	1		4	
1450–59		3	3	3		3	
1460–69		5	2	2		1	
1470–79		3		1		4	
1480–89		2				4	2
1490–99		3				3	

Note: Adapted from Pin-tsun Chang, “The First Chinese Diaspora in Southeast Asia in the Fifteenth Century,” in Roderich Ptak and Dietmar Rothermund, eds., *Emporia, Commodities and Entrepreneurs in Asian Maritime Trade, c. 1400–1750* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1991) 28.

Chinese court records make a point to distinguish the diplomatic role of Chinese, or those descended from Chinese who had taken local names. For example, Li Sanqide came to China from Siam; Zhang Fonama from Palembang, Sumatra; and Chen Muwu from Java. Each of these had Chinese surnames, but their given names were non-Chinese phonetic representations of their local names.⁴⁶ In 1409, the Ming court asked Siam to send back the Chinese person named He Renquan and his followers who had been “wandering around the islands,” and were known to have entered Siam.⁴⁷ In 1411, the Siam envoy (the overseas Chinese Zeng Shouxian) delivered the wanderers to the Chinese authorities.⁴⁸

In 1446, Ai Yan, a person from Semudera (Samudra-Pasai) in Sumatra, was advised that his uncle Song Yun had come to offer tribute during the Zhentong reign, but had been killed by Daxi, a person from Java. Ai Yan noted that Son Yun’s wife Meimeidawai complained about the killing and Daxi had been punished, but Meimeidawai and her attendants were still in Guangdong unable to return home. He requested that the court order Guangdong’s authorities to arrange their return transport, and this was done.⁴⁹ Song Yun was distinguished as an overseas Chinese in the record of his 1439 arrival. He came to the court as a deputy envoy for Bengal.⁵⁰ He appears to have been based in Bengal

rather than Semudera; in contrast, his nephew was based in Semudera. Song Yun was married to a non-Chinese woman, Meimeidawai (*devi?*), and his nephew had a completely local name.

While the Ming had prohibitions on Chinese traveling abroad, they were frequently willing to ignore these restrictions and welcomed the overseas Chinese visitors who they regarded as acting in agency with the court's interests in "bringing tribute to the court."⁵¹ The court regularly rewarded them for their efforts, notably with robes of honor. Huang Fuxing, a resident of Java, was rewarded 159,050 ding of paper money in 1425 for his envoy services, in contrast to the normal several hundred ding paid to non-Chinese envoys in that same era.⁵²

Frequently these Chinese envoys, or the Ming recorders, justified their reception and their overseas residency as the result of being blown off course while fishing or being captured by pirates rather than citation of their emigration reactive to a social crisis in China.⁵³ This was an especially important distinction when overseas Chinese wished to be repatriated. For example, in 1436 Patih Manrong, an envoy from Java who by then had a Javanese name, stated that he was originally Hong Maozai from Longxi county in Fujian, and that he had been captured by Japanese pirates while fishing and had subsequently escaped from them and fled to Java, where he had become a member of the Javanese community, but now wished to return to his homeland. The court approved his request to return.⁵⁴ Another case involved Ma Yongliang, who sojourned to China at least five times, and was a major intermediary between the Java and China courts. He was eventually allowed to return to his village, to visit his family graves, and to finance the construction of an ancestral hall.⁵⁵

The Ming also policed the activities of the overseas Chinese, as best they could in such a vast region, in the interest of promoting the regular flow of merchandise into China's ports and also to monitor and restrict unauthorized contact with foreigners. For example, in 1444, 55 Chinese from Chaozhou in Guangdong were said to have illegally gone to Java to trade, but that there 22 of them had "rebelled" and given their allegiance to Java's ruler. This information was supplied by the remaining 33, who were arrested when they returned to China.⁵⁶ In 1471, Hong Ming from Longxi in Fujian returned to China following his voyage to Melaka to trade, and then returning by way of Siam, where he represented himself as the envoy of the Chinese court as a means of soliciting the local court's favor. On his return to China Fujian military forces met his ship, killed several members of his trading party, and imprisoned Hong Ming.⁵⁷

In a 1487 entry, the envoy Kun Jiang-yue was said to have been sent by Guolong Bolalue Kun Xili Youdiya, the king of the country of Siam, and brought with him a gold leaf missive and offered tribute. The envoy advised:

under the former regulation, our country's fan ["native"] script and Arabic script were both used [in our court correspondence]. Recently, there were differences between the languages of the gold leaf missive by which [there were numerical irregularities]. The king suspects that the people of [China] who [translated] the fan script have engaged in fraud. It is requested that an investigation be conducted. However, the [Siam] fan script of the missive was difficult to understand and it was ordered that the country carry out its own investigation. It was also stipulated that in the future only the use of Arabic script was to be permitted and that difficult-to-understand fan scripts were no longer to be used, so as to prevent abuses.⁵⁸

A *Ming shilu* entry, dated March 22, 1501, reports that traders from Fujian had illegally traveled to Java to trade. There they enticed Gengyisu of Java to obtain an old tally-slip-stub from his father Badi Wuxin, and take fan goods to Guangdong to trade. However, the deception was discovered by the Ministry of Rites. The Fujian traders were arrested and Guangdong ordered to send instructions to the king of Java requiring punishment of Badi Wuxin. Clearly the Fujian-based traders were "illegally" networking with resident Chinese merchants in Java's north coast ports without benefiting the Chinese state (by cutting it out of the revenue), nor had they properly received the Chinese government's permission to leave the country.

CHINESE MARITIME DIASPORA SOJOURNERS C. 1500

Generally historians have been reluctant to see merchant sojourners as sources of cultural transmission, but credit priests, monks, and scholars who took passage alongside them.⁵⁹ But merchant groups who associated with the Muslim, Buddhist, Indic, and Chinese cultural realms had connections that undoubtedly offered opportunities for cultural brokering as noted in Edward Farmer's chapter. Merchants and sailors were not devoid of culture; in fact they were culturally sensitive to the issue of inclusion rather than exclusion, to the point that they built temples and mosques to facilitate, promote, and substantiate their role as members in a ritual community – with focus on their pursuit of societal well-being as rightful and contributing members of a society rather than being obsessed with their personal gain at the expense of others. It was important that merchants focused on Indic, Muslim, or Chinese contributions to world order as the source of their own

legitimacy and a sense of place, to neutralize local characterizations that were not complementary, and to mobilize against potentials of hatred and personal threats to their well-being.

In this study diaspora differentiates populations of a single ethnicity and common referential point of origin, at a point of time. Chinese diaspora, Gujarati diaspora, Javanese diaspora, and others have each been addressed in terms of their ethnic composition and residential base in a variety of changing circumstances that contributed to the composition and distinctive qualities of each diaspora community as they existed at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Above all, this study concludes that it is inappropriate to assume that persons of Chinese ethnicity, usually considered inclusively as “Overseas Chinese,” had similar and continuing commitments and loyalties to their China homeland, to each other, and to their neighbors who were of other ethnicities, and that this evidence of layering among the Chinese diaspora has significance relative to the study of other diaspora.

Clearly in the fifteenth century throughout the Southeast Asian region there were a variety of diasporic residential communities, some of whom maintained commitments to their ethnic homelands and others who were integrating into local societies. For example, at the beginning of the fifteenth century Palembang’s “resident” Chinese were members of two communities, one composed of “settled” merchants and the other a collection of sojourning pirates who used Palembang as their base. The Ming court sent a fleet to destroy the Chinese pirate community, and then encouraged the remaining Chinese residents to renew their linkage with China, and subsequently the Ming court tried to institutionalize this tie by making the community’s leader a Chinese official. This was done in part to reinforce Palembang’s separation from Java, and also to make Palembang’s Chinese community an accountable ally against future piracy in the Straits of Melaka region. The post-1430s decline in Ming interest in Palembang’s Chinese community is demonstrated in the subsequent absence of references to Palembang’s tributary missions to or other contact with the Ming court in the Ming dynastic records during the remainder of the century. Consequently, Palembang redeveloped into an independent Islamic sultanate, in which the prior Chinese community redefined itself and acculturated into a new pluralistic Muslim society.⁶⁰

CHANGES AND TRANSFORMATIONS

During the fifteenth century the Melaka-resident Chinese communities retained their distinctness as Chinese, while maintaining their China linkages (and loyalties) because of continuing opportunities for direct

interaction with the Chinese marketplace.⁶¹ In contrast, the more indirect mid-fifteenth century Ming relationship with the region provided the opportunity for new diasporas to develop, notably the residential Chinese Islamic communities that dominated Java's north coast ports, and also the eastern Indonesian archipelago seafarers who began to participate in the trade routes in significant numbers, and with later consequence.⁶² In the sixteenth century when the Europeans arrived in the archipelago, much as the early fifteenth-century Ming had done, they allied with one or another of the coastal diasporas in a purposeful divide-and-rule strategy, which separated the favored communities from others, and especially from the inland-based traditional court elites.⁶³ But these new alliances also provided the incentive for linkages among the disfavored diaspora to offer opposition against the Europeans. There was thus a layering of diaspora that was based in distinction between the newly arrived and the longstanding residential, and among the non-assimilated, the assimilating, and the assimilated. These diasporic distinctions are foundational to ethnic relations in contemporary Southeast Asia, with consequence to the wider Asian region.⁶⁴

This study has found that after the Ming “withdrawal” from the seas in the 1430s overseas Chinese were acculturating into Southeast Asian societies, or negotiating relationships with their neighboring communities, and were the source of subsequently stable pluralistic communities. In contrast, in the late sixteenth century, after the Ming government revised their restrictions on overseas migrations, newly arrived overseas Chinese were less likely to acculturate, and this was even more the case when the Dutch took control of the Java coastline. The newly arrived Chinese, in contrast to the old, became Dutch allies against local populations, which included Chinese who had previously migrated and acculturated.⁶⁵

NOTES

- 1 John K. Whitmore, “Van-Don, the ‘Mac-Gap,’ and the End of the Jiaozhi Ocean System: Trade and State in Dai-Viet, circa 1450–1550,” in Nola Cooke, Li Tana, and James Anderson, eds., *The Tonking Gulf System Through History* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2013), 101–16, and “India and China on the Eastern Seaboard of Mainland Southeast Asia: Links and Changes, 1100–1600,” in A. Dallapiccola and A. Verghese, eds., *Cultural Dialogues between India and Southeast Asia from the Seventh to the Sixteenth Centuries* (Mumbai: KR Cama Institute, forthcoming); Roxanna M. Brown, *The Ming Gap and Shipwreck Ceramics in Southeast Asia: Towards a Chronology of Thai Trade Ware* (Bangkok: River Books, 2008).
- 2 Kenneth R. Hall, “Commodity Flows, Diaspora Networking, and Contested

Agency in the Eastern Indian Ocean c. 1000–1500,” *TRaNS. Trans-Regional and National Studies of Southeast Asia* 4.1 (2016), 387–417.

- 3 Pierre-Yves Manguin, “Trading Ships of the South China Sea: Shipping Technologies and Their Role in the History and Development of Asian Trade Networks,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 36.3 (1993), 253–80; “The Amorphous Nature of Coastal Polities in Insular Southeast Asia: Restricted Centers, Extended Peripheries,” *Moussons* 4 (2002), 73–99.
- 4 Bin Yang, “Horses, Silver, and Cowries: Yunnan in Global Perspective,” *Journal of World History*, 15.3 (2004), 281–322; Hans Ulrich Vogel, “Cowry Trade and Its Role in the Economy of Yunnan: From the Ninth to the Mid-Seventeenth Century,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 36.3 (1993), 309–53.
- 5 O. W. Wolters, “Studying Srivijaya,” *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 52.2 (1979), 1–52, and “History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asia Perspectives (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982).
- 6 Charles Wheeler, “Cross-Cultural Trade and Trans-Regional Networks in the Port of Hoi An: Maritime Vietnam in the Early Modern Era,” (PhD Dissertation, Yale University, 2001).
- 7 Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Persianization and Mercantilism: Two Themes in Bay of Bengal History,” in Om Prakash and Denys Lombard, eds., *Commerce and Culture in the Bay of Bengal, 1500–1800* (New Delhi: Monohar, 1999), 47–85; Roderich Ptak, “The Northern route to the Spice Islands: South China Sea-Sulu Zone-North Moluccas (Fourteenth to Early Sixteenth Century),” *Archipel*, 43.1 (1992), 27–56; idem., “China and the Trade in Cloves, circa 960–1435,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113.1 (1993), 1–13; idem., “From Quanzhou to the Sulu Zone and Beyond: Questions Related to the Early Fourteenth Century,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 29. 2 (1998), 269–94; Claude Guillot, Denys Lombard, and Roderich Ptak, eds., *From the Mediterranean to the China Sea: Miscellaneous Notes (South China and Maritime Asia* (Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz, 1998).
- 8 Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System AD 1250–1350* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), as critiqued in Kenneth R. Hall, “Cross-Cultural Commercial Competition on the Vietnam Coastline in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries,” *Journal of World History*, 24.1 (2013), 71–105.
- 9 In similar fashion, South Asian weavers “returned to the soil” in bad times, forgoing their weaving and devoting their time to crop production rather than to producing cloth for a marketplace that could not offer them sufficient return for their labor. See Kenneth R. Hall, “The 15th Century Gujarat Cloth Trade with Southeast Asia’s Indonesian Archipelago,” in Lotika Varadarajan, ed., *Gujarat and the Sea* (Greater Noida India: Drshak Itahas Nidhi, 2012), 439–66.
- 10 Hans Ulrich Vogel, “Cowry Trade,” 309–53.
- 11 Tansen Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade: The Realignment of Sino-Indian Relations, 600–1400* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), 160–68. In Sen’s view when the Parthian empire fell to the Sassanids in 225, Persia-based Sassanian and Sogdian merchants emerged as the new leaders among Western traders active in the Indian Ocean and the Central Asian caravan trade. The Sogdians became the most prominent Western traders in Asia from the fourth through the eighth centuries. With the fall of the Persian Empire, Gulf-based traders converted to Islam, and thereafter became one among the numerous Middle Eastern Muslim merchant communities who competed on the Indian

Ocean maritime network, and whose travels were described in new Arabic language literature.

- 12 Kenneth R. Hall, *Networks of Trade, Polity, and Societal Integration in Chola-Era South India, c. 875–1272* (Delhi: Primus Books, 2014); idem., “‘Borderless’ Southeast Asia Historiography: New Scholarship on the Interactions and Exchanges between Southeast Asia and its South Asian and Chinese Neighbours in the Pre-1500 Era,” *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, 167.4 (2011), 527–42.
- 13 Kenneth R. Hall, “Unification of the Upstream and Downstream in Southeast Asia’s First Islamic Polity: The Changing Sense of Community in the Fifteenth-Century Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 42.1 (2001), 198–229; idem., “Maritime Trade and Societal Transitions in the Western Indonesian Archipelago: Samudra-Pasai at the Dawn of the European Age,” *The Asian Review of World Histories* 5.1 (2017), 31–68; Elizabeth Lambourn, “From Cambay to Samudra-Pasai and Gresik – The Export of Gujarat Grave Memorials to Sumatra and Java in the Fifteenth Century,” *Indonesia and the Malay World*, 31 (July 2003), 221–89; eadem., “Tombstones, Texts, and Typologies – Seeing Sources for the Early History of Islam in Southeast Asia,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 52.2 (2008), 252–286.
- 14 Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade*, 151–5.
- 15 Pin-tsun Chang, “The First Chinese Diaspora in Southeast Asia in the Fifteenth Century,” in Roderich Ptak and Dietmar Rothermund, eds., *Emporia, Commodities and Entrepreneurs in Asian Maritime Trade, c. 1400–1750* (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag, 1991), 13–28.
- 16 Billy Kee-Long So, *Prosperity, Region, and Institutions in Maritime China: The South Fukien Pattern, 946–1368* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); Hugh Clark, *Community, Trade and Networks, Southern Fujian Province from the Third to the Fifteenth Centuries*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade*, 231–35; Ptak, “From Quanzhou to the Sulu Zone”; Billy Kee-long So, “Dissolving Hegemony or Changing Trade Patterns: Srivijaya Images in the Chinese Sources of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 29. 2 (1998), 295–308; Li Tana, “A View from the Sea: Perspectives on the Northern and Central Vietnamese Coasts,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 37. 1 (2006), 83–102; John Chaffee, “Diasporic Identities in the Historical Development of the Maritime Muslim Communities of Song-Yuan China,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 49.4 (2006), 395–420; idem., “At the Intersection of Empire and World Trade: The Chinese Port City of Quanzhou (Zaitun), Eleventh-Fifteenth Centuries,” in Kenneth R. Hall, ed., *Secondary Cities and Urban Networking in the Indian Ocean Realm, c. 1400–1800* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), 99–122.
- 17 Paul Wheatley, *Nagara and Commandery: Origins of Southeast Asian Urban Traditions* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Department of Geography, 1983); Geoff Wade and Sun Laichen, eds., *Southeast Asia in the Fifteenth Century: The Ming Factor* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2010), *passim*; Geoff Wade, “The Zheng He Voyages: A Reassessment,” *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 78.1 (2005), 37–58. While denying such Southeast Asian ports “urban” status, Western historians willingly categorize the sixteenth-century Spanish centers in the Caribbean region as “urban,” although most of these similarly had significant residency only when the gold and silver from Mexico and Peru was periodically concentrated in these networked

administrative/market centers prior to its shipment to Spain under the guard of Spanish war vessels.

- 18 Jan Wisseman Christie, "Money and Its Uses in the Javanese States of the Ninth to Fifteenth Centuries AD," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 39.3, (1996), 243–86.
- 19 Bennet Bronson, "Patterns of the Early Southeast Asian Metals Trade," in Ian Glover, ed., *Ancient Trades and Cultural Contacts in Southeast Asia* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1992), 63–114; Ian Glover, Pornchai Suchitta, and John Villiers, eds., *Early Metallurgy, Trade, and Urban Centers in Thailand and Southeast Asia* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1992).
- 20 Elizabeth Lambourn, "India from Aden: Khutba and Muslim Urban Networks in Late Thirteenth Century India," in Kenneth R. Hall, ed., *Secondary Cities and Urban Networking*, 5–97, and "Tombstones."
- 21 Jan Wisseman Christie, "Texts and Textiles in Medieval Java," *Bulletin de l'Ecole Francaise d'Extreme Orient*, 80.1 (1993), 181–211; Kenneth R. Hall, "The Southeast Asian Textile Trade, 1400–1800," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 39.2 (1996), 87–135; Ruth Barnes and Mary Hunt Kahlenberg, eds., *Five Centuries of Indonesian Textiles*, (Munich/New York: Demonico Books/Pestel Publishing, 2010), *passim*.
- 22 Arian Van Aelst, "Majapahit Picis, the Currency of a 'Moneyless' Society 1300–1700," *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde*, 151.3 (1995), 357–93; Christie, "Money and Its Uses."
- 23 Roy Ellen, *On the Edge of the Banda Zone: Past and Present in the Social Organization of a Moluccan Trading Network* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2003).
- 24 Pierre Manguin, "Trading Ships of the South China Sea: Shipping Techniques and Their Role in the History of the Development of Asian Trade Networks," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 36.3 (1993), 253–80.
- 25 Dru C. Gladney, *Dislocating China, Muslims, Minorities, and Other Subaltern Subjects* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 99–149, 166–70, 285–99, 309–11.
- 26 Louise E. Levathes, *When China Rules the Seas: The Treasure Fleet of the Dragon Throne 1405–1437*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Pin-tsun Chang, "The First Chinese Diaspora," 22–6.
- 27 Li Tana, "A View from the Sea," 83–102; John K. Whitmore, "India and China on the Eastern Seaboard."
- 28 Hans Ulrich Vogel, "Cowry Trade."
- 29 Wang Ming, "Reflections on the Study of Zheng He's Expeditions," *Ming Studies*, 17 (2004), 17–53.
- 30 Victor Lieberman, *Strange Parallels. Southeast Asia in the Global Context, c. 800–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), *passim*.
- 31 As modified by Kenneth R. Hall and as detailed in Hyunhee Park, "Port-city Networking in the Indian Ocean Commercial System as Represented in Geographic and Cartographic Works in China and the Islamic West, c. 750–1500," in Kenneth R. Hall, ed., *The Growth of Non-Western Cities, Primary and Secondary Urban Networking c. 900–1900* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 21–53.
- 32 Wang Ming, "Reflections," 32.
- 33 Wang Ming, "Reflections," 24.

- 34 Lucille Chia, "The Butcher, the Baker, and the Carpenter: China Sojourners in the Spanish Philippines and the Impact on South Fujian (Sixteenth-Eighteenth Centuries)," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 49. 4 (2006), 509–34.
- 35 Hok-lam Chan, "The 'Chinese Barbarian Officials' in the Foreign Tribute Missions to China During the Ming Dynasty," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 88 (1968), 411–18; Pin-tsun Chang, "The First Chinese Diaspora," 28.
- 36 *Mingshilu*, 1388, Feb. 26.
- 37 J. V. G. Mills, trans., *Ying-yai Sheng-lan: The Overall Survey of the Ocean Shores* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 89–90.
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CHAPTER 22

DAI VIET IN THE MING WORLD



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For the entire rule of the Ming dynasty, Dai Viet (northern Vietnam, eleventh to eighteenth centuries) was in direct contact with its northern neighbor.² The first sixty of those years (1368–1428) saw rulers either of Chinese descent or Chinese themselves control the Vietnamese. The Tran dynasty (1225–1400), originally from Fujian, rose out of the Ngo (Sino-Vietnamese) community of the lower Red River delta. It was succeeded by its powerful minister, Ho Quy Ly (r. 1400–07), also of Chinese descent, who was in turn crushed by the Ming forces of the Yongle Emperor in 1406–07. This Ngo community, developed since the twelfth century, had a dual loyalty, up the Red River to the Vietnamese capital of Thang Long (Ha Noi) as well as up the coast to the Chinese empire itself. The two Ngo dynasties, Tran and Ho, both, on the one hand, linked themselves to the Chinese past (Zhao Tuo of the second century BCE and the Duke of Zhou/Shun of Antiquity respectively) and, on the other, steadfastly held Dai Viet to be separate from and on equal terms with the Ming court. While necessarily dealing with the new Ming regime, they resisted close relations with it. Yet, with the Ming victory of 1407 and through the twenty-year Chinese occupation of Dai Viet, elements of the Ngo community provided key support for what became Jiaozhi, a province of the empire.³

Over these six decades, the Vietnamese elite turned from a Chan (Viet. Thien) Buddhist orientation to a classical Chinese ('Confucian' Ru, Viet. Nho) one. Originally focusing not on Confucius but on the Duke of Zhou and early Chinese antiquity, the Vietnamese during the Ming occupation existed within a China that emphasized local schools and a redefined Neo-Confucian orthodoxy. They also directly experienced the Sinic bureaucratic state.⁴ Indeed, one of the most significant outgrowths of Ming government was the heavy and transforming influence of this political form across East Asia (as related in Edward Farmer's chapter herein).⁵ The Ming dynasty established a model of bureaucracy and orthodoxy that had great impact, first, on Chosôn and its Yi Dynasty (1392–1910), then on Dai Viet and the Le (1428–1527). Literati cohorts emerged in all three countries and dominated their lands to varying degrees. In Dai Viet, the mid-fifteenth century saw a fourfold transformation take place – in the elite, in the economy, in the scholarly world, and in ideology.⁶ Once the Ming had been forced out by 1428, the victorious Le regime from the western mountains had to determine what form their new state would take and what its relations with the defeated Ming would be. This essay examines these questions for the early (1428–1527) and later (1592–1788) Le as well as for the intervening Mac (1528–92), the latter also of Ngo descent.

ADOPTING MING RITUAL

The segment of Vietnamese society that sought to establish the Ming Sinic pattern in their state and society formed from those educated in classical Chinese texts and thought. Taught predominantly in village schools, it would appear, they were not divorced from other elements of their culture. Yet, not unlike their Korean counterparts discussed elsewhere in this volume, they believed that the modern Sinic way was the right way to achieve good government and cosmic harmony. With a few exceptions (such as the great fifteenth-century ruler Le Thanh-tong, r. 1460–97, and his son Hien-tong, r. 1498–1504), these educated individuals were quite separate from the ruling family and the aristocratic elite. Hence the literati access to power depended not strictly on their own abilities but on the interest and willingness of the throne and the aristocracy to utilize those abilities. The pattern favored by the literati at the state level therefore existed in a context ultimately decided upon by the king and the aristocracy. Times favorable to the literati were the reigns of Le Thanh-tong and his son Hien-tong, of the Mac dynasty (though generally lacking records), and of the later Trinh lords who controlled the Le kings (1650s on). Years of elite disinterest were periods of aristocratic control or military rule (1504–27, 1592–1650s). The

beginning of the Le dynasty (1428–1460) was a time of debate over this very issue.

These Vietnamese literati mainly came from the delta lowlands of the Red River immediately surrounding the capital of Thang Long. Emerging from the villages, they passed the triennial examinations and served in the capital or throughout the provinces. As described below, a number of them went on embassies to the Ming court. The existing texts tend to show Vietnamese scholar-officials more directly involved in practice than in theory. Their efforts were more likely to be pragmatic and political than intellectual or philosophical (especially as compared to those of their Chinese, Korean, and Japanese counterparts).⁷ As the powers that be contested court and capital, these literati advocated as best they could for their programs. Elsewhere I and others have described the Vietnamese adoption of the Ming pattern in their examinations, administration, law, and ideology.⁸ Here I focus on the ritual core of the new system, that by which the Vietnamese rulers originated their Sinic reforms.

I begin in the 1430s with a court debate over the nature of the proper ritual to be performed, leading to the decision to install the contemporary Ming pattern. Then, in the 1460s, under Le Thanh-tong, educated by literati, came the installation of the central ritual, that of the *Giao* (Ch. *Jiao*), the Suburban Sacrifice to Heaven. This strongly literati regime lasted for 40 years until, early in the sixteenth century, powerful aristocratic families tore it apart. After several unsuccessful efforts, the literati regime was restored by the Mac dynasty. Unfortunately, we lack documentation for the regime during this period and need to go into the seventeenth century to see resumption of the literati system. The Le court was restored by the military regime of the Trinh which, for half a century, shunted the literati and their programs aside. Only when the Trinh encountered serious problems did some of its members draw on the administrative abilities of the literati and help re-introduce the literati program into the capital and the court. As the Ming disappeared at mid-century, their pattern, as recreated in Dai Viet, was re-emerging. The *Giao* sacrifice reappeared as presented by the literati and allowed by the Trinh lords.

THE DEBATE

In the fourth year of his reign (1437), the young second ruler Thai-tong (r. 1434–42) of the new Le dynasty begun by his father Le Loi (Thai-to, r. 1428–33) less than a decade earlier, ordered the distinguished minister Nguyen Trai (1360–1442) and another official, a eunuch, Luong Dang,

to re-examine the royal carriage, the musical instruments, and the mode of musical and dance training.⁹ The 1430s marked a cultural void in the court and capital of Dai Viet. The new rulers and aristocracy had just emerged from the highlands, near what is now the Lao border region, and a decade of war against the Ming occupiers. The previous lowland aristocracy of the Tran dynasty had been seriously disrupted, first, by the seizure of power by the Ho family and then by the Ming occupation.¹⁰ The Buddhism of the Tran dynasty was seriously weakened, and the local highland practices of the new Le court were not enough to fill the resulting void. Into this cultural emptiness stepped the literati. With their focus on Chinese texts, they sought to bring a Sinic model into the state and court of Dai Viet. Only there were two groups of literati in the country, divided by generation. The older had their intellectual roots in the previous century when Vietnamese scholars had advocated, against the dominant Buddhism of the day, the belief in Chinese, then Vietnamese, antiquity centered on the Duke of Zhou.¹¹ Against the more eclectic beliefs of this generation stood the younger scholars, raised (and no doubt educated) during the Ming occupation.¹² For these latter scholars, a more standard belief system, focused on Confucius and the contemporary orthodoxy of the Ming court, formed their answer on how to fill the ideological void.

Through the 1430s, there emerged the debate over the nature of court ritual, one reminiscent of earlier Chinese debates when a new emperor sought to strengthen his position via such reform.¹³ As detailed in the *Chronicle of Dai Viet*, in early 1437 the throne ordered Nguyen Trai and Luong Dang to bring order to the royal ceremony. This simple command set in motion a major conflict. Trai shortly presented his proposal to the throne. Reflecting the position of the older generation of scholars, more attuned to indigenous matters, this proposal sought to establish their view of how the court should operate. Focusing on an instrument of longstanding in Dai Viet, the *khanh* (lithophone/stone chime), Trai seems to have advocated a continuity of past ceremonial practices. With the sixty years of fighting versus Champa to the south and China (1370–1430) over, he stated, “Now is precisely the time when we should perform the ritual and the music!” Yet the “proper patterns” (Viet. *van*/Ch. *wen*) had been disrupted, and there was a strong need to re-establish them. “Peace is the basis of music; sound forms its proper pattern.” There was the need, in Trai’s view, to strengthen the necessary study and training and thereby to bring harmony to the performance. The throne was favorable to his proposal and ordered stonemasons in Thanh Hoa province to the south, for centuries the prime source of the best stone, to produce the necessary instruments.¹⁴

Yet, by mid-year, a stalemate had begun to occur between Nguyen

Trai and Luong Dang. Trai declared that, while the two had worked together on establishing the proper music, they could not agree. Dang thereupon presented his own proposal, putting forward a detailed outline of court ritual, the Great and the Ordinary Ceremonies. The former included the Sacrifice to Heaven, reports to the royal temples, and Tet Nguyen Dan (the lunar New Year); the latter the full and new moon ceremonies each month. Now the throne swung to Dang's side (and that of the younger modernist officials), as Trai withdrew. Dang continued to present more details of his proposal, and the older officials continued to resist them. As the *Chronicle* stated, "In general the proposals put forward by Luong Dang and Nguyen Trai had many points in disagreement. Their discussions on large and small musical ensembles, on heavy and light music, had many points contrary to each other, and their reports did not agree." The throne chose Dang's detail and used it for a visit to the Ancestral Temple. As a result, "There were no further performances of suggestive and lewd, vulgar and boisterous music."¹⁵

In the fall, Luong Dang presented what the *Chronicle* explicitly called "the new music," bringing the contemporary system of the Ming court into Thang Long. The *Chronicle* proceeded to go into detail about this music.¹⁶ Dang and the younger generation of Vietnamese scholars were looking directly to the Ming court for their inspiration and used Ming elements to tailor their own answers for the new and developing Le court at Thang Long. Unlike the contemporary Chosôn court, the Vietnamese seem to have drawn less on earlier Sinic textual traditions as on their own more direct experience with Ming performance. Here Dang readjusted and shrunk the Chinese orchestras down to the size he wished for the Vietnamese court. This was occurring simultaneously as Vietnamese officials were urging the Le court and its young ruler Thai-tong toward an ideology of correlative cosmology, the specific sense that what the ruler did directly affected the cosmic and natural balance. Gradually, Thai-tong accepted his cosmic responsibility for maintaining harmony first within the court, next within the state, and finally within nature itself.¹⁷ This whole process included the proper rites, which, as the literati pointed out, meant those of the Ming.

The debate over ritual in the court of Dai Viet came to a head at the end of 1437. Thai-tong accepted Luong Dang's proposal for the high and low rituals and the court functions, and these were put into effect. As the *Chronicle* stated, "Performing the ritual (in this fashion) began from this time." But Nguyen Trai and the older officials were not finished. They counter-attacked and, citing the cultural hero of their school of thought, the Duke of Zhou, complained that Dang was neither capable nor above reproach and that his proposal was overly elaborate

and deceptive, containing discrepancies. Nevertheless, Thai-tong proceeded with the new system. Its grandeur put greater distance between the throne and the court, placing him as ruler higher above the warrior aristocracy, his father's old comrades. Wearing his new dragon robe and headgear, which represented Heaven and Earth, the young ruler now stood strongly over his conflicted court.¹⁸

THE SUBURBAN (*GIAO*) SACRIFICE

From the late 1430s, we must presume that the Ming style of ritual proposed by Luong Dang continued in the court of Dai Viet. There is no reference to any more changes. The old pattern advocated by Nguyen Trai had been put aside. Nonetheless, in the raucous and competitive decades of the 1440s and 1450s, how thoroughly the court was able to implement the new pattern is difficult to say. Thai-tong died mysteriously, and Nguyen Trai and his clan were executed for it. Thai-tong's second son and successor Nhan-tong (r. 1443–59) died at the hands of his older half-brother who was in turn overthrown. The mountain aristocracy dominated the throne and the officials until finally in the 1460s Le Loi's youngest grandson joined with officials (now dominated by the younger generation) to transform the court and the state.¹⁹

This young ruler, Le Thanh-tong, pushed for what he termed a “Restoration” (Viet. *Trung Hung*/Ch. *Zhongxing*) and under its guise brought the Ming bureaucratic style of government fully into Dai Viet.²⁰ One of the first matters to which he attended, toward the end of 1461, was to re-establish the Suburban Sacrifice. Declaring,

(As) We are newly involved in the affairs of state and newly striving for its virtue, following the statutes of our sainted ancestors, at the beginning of spring (lunar New Year) (We) shall take part in the Suburban Sacrifice. They say that our predecessors (Thai-tong, Nhan-tong) did establish the Suburban ritual, but were also not fit to pass it on. They say that our country was among the frontier lands of antiquity – you (lords) follow the way (*dao*) of death, (with) hearts that have no ruler!²¹

There was thus the need to cleanse the court and the state, and the Suburban Sacrifice was the way to start. What, in effect, they sought was a cosmic restoration, not a mere dynastic one, to bring harmony back to the land, a cosmic harmony begun by Thanh-tong's father Thai-tong, but disrupted in the events of the previous quarter century.

Over the three and a half decades of his long reign, this ceremony continued in Thang Long. In 1469, as he was changing his reign title to

the famous Hong Duc (Pervading Virtue, 1470–97), Thanh-tong declared, “What separates man from the beasts is ritual, that which sets and preserves the pattern (Viet. *van*/Ch. *wen*). If there were no ritual, sexuality would run rampant, loose morals would flourish, and there would be nothing that would not happen!” Two years later, right after formally establishing the Ming bureaucratic system, he addressed the issue of court garb and ranks, beginning by stating, “The court is a place of ritual and music,” and going on to stress the hierarchical importance of proper court clothing, citing the sage kings of Chinese antiquity, Shun and Yu. “Our land is calm everywhere, following the rites and patterns (Viet. *le van*/Ch. *li wen*) of old.” In 1473, the king plowed the first furrow and oversaw the officials plow theirs (see Campbell’s chapter), then performed the Suburban Sacrifice, before heading off to the Western Capital of Mount Lam to sacrifice to his ancestors. And in 1485, Thanh-tong began his discussion of agricultural ritual by declaring, “[The purpose of] ritual is to make good the hearts of the people; [the purpose of] agriculture is to provide sufficient food and clothing. These two matters are the urgent affairs of state and the responsibility of officials to nourish and sustain the people.” Part of these officials’ responsibilities was to instruct the people in the ritual, old and new.²²

Thus, we can see Le Thanh-tong’s core approach to matters of ritual in his court, and the Suburban Sacrifice continued to play a key role in his cosmic formulations. Thanh-tong’s establishment of the integrated Suburban Sacrifice to Heaven and Earth seems to have reflected what the Ming continued to observe through the fifteenth century. Taizu had rejected the separate Heaven and Earth sacrifices and established the single sacrifice to both.²³

How much did the Suburban Sacrifice of Le Thanh-tong follow the contemporary standard Ming system? What Taizu had established, “manipulat[ing] selected Confucian truths and Han historical memories” in the process, and Taizong had carried on, certainly formed the background for the Vietnamese ritual of the 1460s. We know that Thanh-tong readjusted the Ming bureaucratic system when he brought it into Dai Viet,²⁴ so we would expect similar changes in the detail of the ritual borrowings as he undoubtedly scaled the ceremony down. Unfortunately, we have no description by which to judge. The Vietnamese scholar Phan Huy Chu, writing over 300 years later in the early nineteenth century, also wondered. Citing the *Zhou Li* and the *Li Jing*, he noted the double purpose of the Suburban Sacrifice “of old”: to greet the moderate weather (at the winter solstice) and to request good crops at New Year (on the first day of spring). However, these two ceremonies no longer applied and only the joint Sacrifice to Heaven and

Earth at the beginning of spring still existed. Chu specifically stated that it was in the Hongwu reign that the Ming had established their rituals and that the early Le had introduced this pattern into Dai Viet. “For more than 300 years thereafter, they continued to follow this without change,” he declared.²⁵

During the sixteenth century, this Hong Duc model established by the literati went through traumatic times. Pushed aside not once, but twice, it would reach a low point in the first half of the seventeenth century.²⁶ As the ritual system of the Ming court underwent major changes in the reign of Shizong (1521–66), that of Dai Viet was shattered by warfare in the first quarter of the sixteenth century, resurrected by the new Mac dynasty after 1528, and finally went into eclipse with the Mac defeat in the 1590s.²⁷ The restored Le dynasty, controlled by Trinh lords, was a military regime that paid little attention to the literati and their institutions. This regime is twice recorded as performing the Suburban Sacrifice during its campaign against the Mac (1572, 1578), but this may have been in competition with the presumed (but unrecorded) rites of the Mac in the capital. Once the Le forces took Thang Long, we hear no more of such ritual.²⁸

Only as the Ming were being defeated in the 1640s and 1650s (see chapter nineteen by Swope and Hang’s chapter fourteen) was the literati system brought back into the court of Dai Viet. The Trinh military regime was unable to defeat its old partners, and now rivals, the Nguyen lords on the southern frontier and unite the country.²⁹ Gradually, one of the Trinh family, Tac, began to resurrect the fortunes of the literati and to bring them first into his entourage, then into the government itself. In the effort to defeat the Nguyen, Tac eventually transformed, yet again, the state and government of Dai Viet, in the same way it had originally been transformed 200 years earlier in the 1460s, utilizing the Ming model. In 1645, as in 1461, one of the first acts in this direction was to hold the Suburban Sacrifice, now specifically called the *Nam Giao*, Southern Suburban Sacrifice.³⁰ But was the seventeenth-century Vietnamese reconstruction of the *Nam Giao* a preservation of the Hongwu reign’s established ritual from the fifteenth century? Or did it reflect later developments, particularly the Great Rites Controversy and the ritual reforms of the sixteenth century? Shizong had separated the sacrifices, one each for Heaven and for Earth.³¹

Phan Huy Chu indicated that it was Taizu’s, not Shizong’s, ritual that seventeenth century Dai Viet continued to follow.

From the Han on, they held the joint Sacrifice to Heaven and Earth and only built up the altar (each time). The system of performing in a covered space began with the

Hongwu reign of the Ming. The Le dynasty, from its Restoration [1592], only [fully] [re]-established this system at this time [1663].

Citing the *Zhou Li* and “the system of the Duke of Zhou,” Chu claimed that doing the sacrifice indoors “revealed a closeness with Heaven.” It was to be held at the beginning of spring.³² This would indicate that Taizu’s pattern remained that of Dai Viet’s and that Shizong’s ritual changes had no impact there. Yet Phan Huy Chu’s detailed description shows a shortened version of the Chinese form, with the Trinh lords de-emphasizing the Le emperor. Still undoubtedly Ming in its basic pattern, it had become a Vietnamese version.³³

COMPARATIVE COMMENTS

This Ming stance of the court in Dai Viet contrasted strongly with that taken in Chosôn. There, at the same time in the court of Yi Sejong (r. 1418–50), the Koreans both insisted on a pre-Ming, especially Song period, approach to the rites and continued to put themselves at a lower cosmic position vis-à-vis the Ming court. Where the Vietnamese stated that they were explicitly following the observed Ming pattern, the Koreans preferred to seek out and apply earlier sources. Where the Vietnamese had no compunction about applying the full panoply of the Ming imperial structure to themselves, particularly the Suburban Sacrifice to Heaven (to be performed only by an Emperor) on a regular basis, the Korean ruler saw himself in the lesser guise of aristocrat in service to the Ming Emperor. The Chosôn court did not perform the great Sacrifice to Heaven in any regular way. Only when it needed to appeal directly to Heaven, mainly at times of a major lack of rain, would this court perform the rite.³⁴ So, where the Korean court, located quite close to the Ming capital, kept itself beneath the latter, but culturally distant, the court of Dai Viet, much farther from the Ming Emperor, maintained its longstanding stance of equality, easily taking on the trappings of emperor, and yet reversed its prior stance of separation and directly engaged the contemporary Ming pattern.

CONTACTS WITH THE MING COURT

How did the Vietnamese literati come to know the Ming system? Besides the direct experience of the occupation and Chinese texts, there were ongoing missions to the imperial court. The world of China in its great ages – Han, Tang, Song, and here Ming – opened a broad and rich cultural field to those who visited. Where the Tran and Ho regimes had

held a separate, related, but culturally distinct relationship with the Ming court, the Le, from the beginning, particularly after 1460, acted to share in “the domain of manifest civility.”³⁵ Acknowledging their debt to this domain, the Vietnamese proclaimed allegiance to the Sinic world, while setting their own path. Beside the standard role of political subordination and contact that these tributary missions undertook, they increasingly brought Vietnamese literati in touch with their Sinic fellows. This included administrative and social roles, as well as literary. As the court in Thang Long drew itself into the Sinic philosophical realm, “the domain of manifest civility,” an increasing number of the envoys sent to the Ming court were literati (though far fewer than those sent by Chosôn). As a result, contact with China via embassies played a role in the transformation of Dai Viet.

The first sixty years of Ming–Vietnamese relations (1368–1428) were quite turbulent, involving as they did constant clashes and then colonialization. Embassies in these years were sporadic and generally involved Vietnamese behavior disliked by the Ming or direct clashes between Vietnamese and Chinese. As Zhu Yuanzhang established his dynasty in China, Dai Viet and its Tran dynasty were crumbling before Champa power to the south and faced one of the worst crises in their existence. In the resulting diplomatic competition, Champa outdid the Vietnamese for Ming favor. Then, as the Vietnamese sought to regain strength under Ho Quy Ly, the Ming under the Yongle emperor took umbrage at the usurpation. These problems, together with direct border conflicts, led to a major confrontation. The result was the massive Ming invasion of 1406–07 that conquered Dai Viet and returned it to the status of a Chinese province, Jiaozhi. The victorious Ming generals easily convinced their emperor of indigenous desire to rejoin the empire.³⁶

Two decades of occupation and exploitation led to the successful revolt of the Le from Mount Lam after Taizong’s death. In 1427, Le Loi put a Tran on the throne of Dai Viet to mollify the departing Ming, then deposed him and took the throne himself as Thai-to. The resulting Le dynasty would outlast the Ming by a century and a half. We here examine the diplomatic contacts that the Le and their temporary successors the Mac had with the Ming and the increasing role that Vietnamese literati had in the embassies. We then look at the role these literati played on their return to Dai Viet and what they might have gained in China.

VIETNAMESE EMBASSIES

In the 220 years of Le/Mac-Ming contact, there were four general periods. First, for 35 years (1427–62), heavy traffic existed between the two countries. Then for 40 years (1464–1504) the Vietnamese established a standard, settled pattern of contact, generally once every three years with occasional special missions. The sixteenth century, however, saw a very broken, unsettled pattern as Vietnamese regimes splintered and fell. Finally, the Le regained the throne, and the seventeenth century saw another period of settled contact, though this time only half as regularly with double missions going once every six years or so.³⁷

At the beginning of the Le dynasty, through the middle of the fifteenth century, the heavy traffic of embassies between the two capitals of Thang Long and Beijing arrived every year or two. The new Vietnamese regime continuously sought recognition, offered tribute, congratulations, and condolences, and explained events that were occurring on their joint border. The Vietnamese, understandably leery of Chinese intent, kept in constant contact with the Ming court.³⁸ This flow of embassies was both a means of convincing the Ming that all was as it should be in the south and a reaction to internal struggles within Dai Viet. Thanh-tong stabilized the pattern of embassies, bringing it to the standard one every three years, with the occasional extra one for special matters. In particular, the latter involved the Vietnamese invasions of Champa (1470–71) and the Tai region of the Mekong (1479).³⁹ Even as late as 1488, the Vietnamese sent a major embassy to Beijing to explain the situation. Thanh-tong died in 1497, and his son Hien-tong maintained his father's system until his own death seven years later.⁴⁰

The four decades of stability ended dramatically as court factions fought, rebellion rose in the countryside, and strongmen sought power throughout the sixteenth century. Embassies went to Beijing only sporadically after 1504, as the varied regimes struggled to maintain normalcy, specifically in the period 1507–18. For the Mac, embassies only went to China for 10 years, 1538–48, beginning with difficult negotiations over investiture.⁴¹ When the Ming retained the Mac ambassador, keeping him for almost two decades, it froze Vietnamese–Chinese relations through the middle of the century. At the same time, surviving Le and their supporters took refuge in their mountain home of Mount Lam, and through the last third of the sixteenth century built a strong challenge that swept the Mac from Thang Long in 1592. The Mac sent two major embassies north in 1580 and 1584, but undoubtedly gained little satisfaction and ceased contact thereafter.⁴² In the 1590s, Trinh lords chased the Mac into the northern mountains (where they survived under Ming protection), placed the Le back on the throne in Thang Long, and consolidated their own power over Dai Viet.

The Le then sent their first embassy in 1597⁴³ and continued their contact with the Ming for almost fifty years to its very end. Once again, Vietnamese embassies settled into a pattern, this time not once every three years, but instead a double embassy more or less every six years. No special embassies were sent otherwise. The final embassy to the Ming in 1646 went to Fujian for contact with the remnants of the dynasty.⁴⁴ (The new southern Nguyen regime had little success in contacting the Ming court, especially as the Nguyen were under direct attack by the Trinh from 1627 on. This Trinh aggressiveness against the south may have been taking advantage of the crumbling Ming regime on their north.)

COMPOSITION OF THE EMBASSIES

Who made up these embassies from Dai Viet to Beijing? I am particularly concerned with the role that literati played in them. By “literati,” I am looking specifically for those scholars who passed the examinations as *Tiensi* (Ch. *Jinshi*). A mixture of older style examinations was held in the 1420s and 1430s, with the modern Ming kind beginning in the 1440s. The latter were then interrupted before being restarted for the first time on a regular basis (every three years) by Thanh-tong in 1463. Thereafter, the examinations were strongly tied to the legitimacy of the Vietnamese regime, and holding them every three years became quite important.⁴⁵

The number of literati envoys also changed as regimes changed in Thang Long and as the number of embassies rose and fell.⁴⁶ The periodization here is slightly different from that of the embassies noted above. For the first twenty years (1427–47) as the embassy traffic flourished, there were very few scholars. The modern examinations did not start until 1442, and the scholars available were of the old fourteenth-century school strongly integrated into the aristocratic regime, Dao Cong Soan in particular. Of the 73 envoys named, only 10 (14 percent) had passed the old examinations (and this included Dao Cong Soan three times and another scholar twice, so only seven individual scholars actually went). During this period, in the 1430s and 1440s, the younger generation of modernist scholars was emerging. These literati had undoubtedly been strongly influenced by the Ming school system set up in Jiaozhi. As compared to the earlier scholars, these literati were “noisy,” proclaiming how Dai Viet should follow modern Ming ways. In the twenty years from 1447 to 1467, as the aristocracy lost its power, an increasing number of scholars, especially the younger modernists (graduates of the examinations in the 1440s),

traveled to Beijing. Of the 52 envoys listed, 21 (40 percent) were scholars (4 older, 17 younger). As these scholars went on their missions, another group of scholars arose, those who passed the examinations in the regular system established by Thanh-tong from 1463 on. Yet, while Thanh-tong was strongly pro-modernist in his stance, he did not turn the embassies over to his scholars. Instead, he had a vested interest in maintaining a balance between the scholarly and the aristocracy. However, on the important mission of 1488, the entire embassy consisted of his examination graduates. Thanh-tong's son Hien-tong did favor the scholars. Overall, in the almost four decades from 1467 to 1504, 52 (63 per cent) of the 83 envoys were graduates, all but two from the examinations that Thanh-tong had established.

Through almost the entire sixteenth century, those on the scattered embassies were mainly scholars. From 1504 to 1584, 54 (82 percent) of the known 66 envoys were literati. In their initial embassies (to 1548), the Mac mainly used scholars from the Le period (and its examinations of 1502–26), undoubtedly to help establish legitimacy in the eyes of the Ming. On the major embassies of 1580 and 1584, they used their own scholars, primarily from the examinations of the 1550s. The 66 envoys also included 2 sent by the Le in exile, neither of whom was a known scholar. However, once the Le and Trinh regained power in the 1590s, they turned almost exclusively to scholars for their embassies (45 [96 percent] of the 47 envoys are known to have had *Tiensi* degrees). This is curious, since otherwise the Le/Trinh regime was strongly military and very much de-emphasized the literati role in the government of Dai Viet as well as the examinations that produced these scholars.⁴⁷ It would appear that, as in the twelfth century under the Ly dynasty,⁴⁸ the Vietnamese regime used scholars primarily as diplomats to handle their relations with China. This is in contrast to the Japanese, who generally employed Zen monks as diplomats, though it is worth noting that Japan, unlike Dai Viet and Chosôn, lacked a Chinese-style exam system and administrative apparatus.

From the first half of the fifteenth century to the middle of the seventeenth, there was thus a strong move to include top scholars in the embassies to Beijing.⁴⁹ Despite similarities between the newly established Le of the 1430s and 1440s and the restored Le of the early seventeenth century, the latter used scholars where the former generally did not. While the scholarly Thanh-tong maintained a mix of literati and non-literati, his Le and Mac successors predominantly used scholars. Overall, by my count, 1694 scholars passed the examinations in this time period and 244 of them went on embassies a total of 268 times, approximately 15 per cent of the total *Tiensi*, varying by period. (In comparison, Chosôn sent hundreds more, as each of the many embassies had about

forty people, scholars and servants.⁵⁰) The main impact in Thang Long of the returned scholars took place during Thanh-tong's long reign. From the late 1440s, through the 1450s, and into the 1460s, modernists increasingly joined the embassies. For them, the China visits must have been spectacular. They returned to play roles in the political turmoil of the 1450s and 1460s. They taught the young royal siblings (Nhan-tong and his three half-brothers), joined the government of the eldest prince on his coup of 1459, and supported the youngest, Thanh-tong, when he got his turn on the throne the following year. Together these literati and their young king (in his twenties) countered the aristocracy and transformed the state of Dai Viet. Former literati envoys like Nguyen Cu Dao, Nguyen Nhu Do, and Nguyen Ba Ky advised and assisted Le Thanh-tong as he undertook these changes.

From these examinations and into the new bureaucratic structure came the new set of scholars, many more than their predecessors. They too went on embassies to China and undoubtedly thrived there, but returned not to change their world, rather to carry out what they had seen in China in their own flourishing country. These bright young men became partners with their scholarly ruler, now truly an emperor (*Hoang De*), and staffed the agencies (the Han Lam Academy and the Eastern Pavilion [Dong Cac], developed from Ming institutions⁵¹) that directly advised and supported the throne. Men like Quach Dinh Bao and Dam Van Le went to China and came back as major participants in the effort to make Dai Viet a modern Sinic state. They also joined their king in cultural pursuits, helping produce the major texts of the era and exchanging matching poetic verse (*hoa*) with him.⁵² In the seventeenth century, Vietnamese literati had a greater chance to visit China than had their predecessors, and while there they undoubtedly thought about re-establishing the Ming system in Dai Viet. Returnees like Duong Tri Trach would eventually do just that, joining with Trinh lords to bring Thanh-tong's Ming model back in the 1660s,⁵³ just as their predecessors, the young modernists of the 1450s and 1460s, had done two centuries earlier.

LITERATI ENVOYS IN CHINA

What did the Vietnamese literati gain in China while on their embassies? They traveled from their capital of Thang Long north through Lang Son province to the great gate of Nam Quan at the border with China, then through Guangxi province and downriver, passing through Siming, Taiping, Nanning, and Guilin to Jiangsu in the rich Yangtze delta region and the thousand-mile long Grand Canal.⁵⁴ The Vietnamese, according

to later maps, noted the rivers, roads, and mountains along which they passed, and the walled towns, villages, bridges, and temples they observed.

What would these Vietnamese literati envoys have been looking for? This undoubtedly varied with the individual and with the particular moment over the 220 years of Le/Mac contact with the Ming. Anxious over their degree of learning and ability to function properly within “the domain of manifest civility,” at least some of the Vietnamese envoys held their own with fellow Chinese and Korean literati.⁵⁵ But these men were government officials, and their own cohort had a particular bent to it. While our literati envoys would have been struck by living in the world’s greatest capital, as well as by the magnificent ritual and social (including poetic) occasions in which they found themselves, I believe that the most important matter for them was the great Ming government itself and how it operated. This government, in their eyes, would have been astounding, both in its size and in its functioning. These Vietnamese literati officials would, I think, have seen a very strong relationship between the prosperity and power they observed and the government in whose midst they sat.

The goals of these literati were official wealth and power, to strengthen the Vietnamese state. The Ming government was the modern model they took in order to accomplish this, at times irrespective of the immediate wishes of their own court and ruler. As the literati envoys sat in Beijing, carried out their missions, and interacted with other scholars (Chinese, Korean, et al.), I believe that they concentrated on the structure of the Ming administration, on their fellow officials who carried out the day-to-day responsibilities of this structure, and on how this bureaucracy participated in the major events of their own day, ritual and political. The “mechanics of governmental operations,” to use Frederick Mote’s phrase,⁵⁶ would have impressed the Le/Mac envoys from the 1420s all the way to the end of the Ming. These envoys would have noted how their Chinese colleagues interacted with individual monarchs and those around the throne, how these colleagues handled state and local matters, and how important documents and their handling were to running government. (In Mote’s phrase, for the Sinic bureaucracy, “paper was power.”⁵⁷) A major part of what the Vietnamese literati envoys took back with them to Thang Long was undoubtedly a firm sense of how a strong and prosperous government should be run – the ideal situation was one in which the ruler and the literati worked in tandem. As they visited Beijing through the years, the Vietnamese envoys observed the Ming emperors, especially Jiajing, and the variety of behaviors they exhibited all the way to the court’s bitter end. Thus they beheld how an empire, even that of the Great Ming,

should not be ruled.

On their return, the Vietnamese literati envoys partook of the continued and ongoing struggles of their fellow literati to develop the state of Dai Viet. As returnees from Beijing (like Hajjis come home from Mecca?), they would have enhanced their cohort and strengthened its situation in Vietnamese society. A number of them, from Dao Cong Soan to Duong Tri Trach, were heavily involved in the governance of Dai Viet, serving in prestigious offices and guiding the fate of their country. In the main, where possible, they pushed forward the literati agenda, administratively, ritually, and ideologically, in Thang Long and worked to establish the Sinic bureaucratic state across their countryside. As members of one cohort among many in Dai Viet, the literati envoys sought to shore up and expand their cohort's role in Vietnamese society, especially in the ritual, urging a broader place for their ideology among the people. The added status, awareness, and knowledge brought back from the Ming capital by these literati envoys played an important role in the emergence of the early modern state in Vietnam.

THE MING IN DAI VIET'S WORLD

Thus, over the entire Ming era, elements of Ming modernism came to exist within the royal and aristocratic hierarchy that dominated Vietnamese society. While peaking during the reigns of Le Thanh-tong and his son Hien-tong in the late fifteenth century, at no time did the literati have control of the court and state of Dai Viet. The Ming elements brought in (ritual, examinations, bureaucracy, law, paperwork, etc.) existed in Thang Long only as the throne and the nobility allowed. And kings and lords did so only if the literati directly served their purposes. Dai Viet in these centuries was neither Confucian nor Sinic, though it was more so in the mid-seventeenth century than it had been in the mid-fourteenth. As we have seen, Dai Viet's world adopted, adapted, and absorbed Ming literati elements, becoming in part somewhat more like the Ming, but not becoming a Ming replica. The Vietnamese literati in their villages and capital, especially those back from China, advocated and promoted Ming elements with some success, but without achieving the full extent they wished.

NOTES

- 1 The two main parts of this essay were originally presented as 'Vietnamese Embassies and Literati Contacts' for the Association of Asian Studies Annual Meeting, Chicago, 2001, and 'The Fate of Ming Ritual and Music in Dai Viet,

Changing Regimes, Changing Musics,’ for the conference, ‘Musiking in Late Ming China,’ Ann Arbor, MI, 2006. This chapter is offered in the memory of the late Dr R.B. Smith of SOAS, the University of London.

- 2 K. Baldanza, *Ming China and Vietnam*, Negotiating Borders in Early Modern Asia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 55–56, 204–5. This work provides a detailed and excellent discussion of Ming–Đại Việt relations. For a detailed record of these relations, see Nguyễn Thị Kiều Trang, *Về Quan Hệ Sách Phong, Triều Cống Minh- Đại Việt* (On the Tribute Relations Between the Ming and Đại Việt) (Hà Nội: NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia Sự Thật, 2016).
- 3 J.K. Whitmore, “Ngo (Chinese) Communities and Montane-Littoral Conflict in Dai Viet, ca. 1400–1600,” *Asia Major*, 3rd ser., 27, 2 (2014), 54–65; idem., “Keeping the Emperor Out: Trieu Da and Ming Taizu in the Vietnamese Chronicle,” in S. Schneewind, ed., *Long Live the Emperor! Uses of the Ming Founder Across Six Centuries of East Asian History* (Minneapolis, MN: Society of Ming Studies, 2008), 345–53; idem., *Vietnam, Ho Quy Ly, and the Ming, 1371–1421* (New Haven, CT: Southeast Asian Studies, Yale University, 1985).
- 4 J.K. Whitmore, “Chu Van An and the Rise of Antiquity in 14th Century Dai Viet,” *Vietnam Review*, 1 (1996), 50–61; idem., *Vietnam, Ho Quy Ly, and the Ming, 1371–1421*, ch. 6; Ong Eng, Ann, “Contextualising the Book-Burning Episode During the Ming Invasion and Occupation of Vietnam,” in G. Wade and L. Sun, eds., *Southeast Asia in the Fifteenth Century*, The China Factor (Singapore: NUS Press, 2010), 154–65; K.W. Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 154–80.
- 5 See also R.C. Provine, “State Sacrificial Music and Korean Identity,” 54–75, and E.S. Rawski, “The Creation of an Emperor in Eighteenth Century China,” 150–76, both in B. Yung, E.S. Rawski, and R.S. Watson, eds., *Harmony and Counterpoint*, Ritual Music in the Chinese Context (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), on the Korean court of Chosôn.
- 6 J.K. Whitmore, “Literati Culture and Integration in Dai Viet, c.1430–c.1840,” in V.B. Lieberman, ed., *Beyond Binary Histories* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 221–43; idem., “Gender, State, and History: The Literati Voice in Vietnam,” in B.W. Andaya, ed., *Other Pasts*, Women, Gender, and History in Early Modern Southeast Asia (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2000), 230.
- 7 P.J. Ivanhoe, *Three Streams, Confucian Reflections on Learning and the Moral Heart-Mind in China, Korea, and Japan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
- 8 J.K. Whitmore, ‘The Development of Le Government in Fifteenth Century Vietnam,’ Ph.D. Diss. (Cornell University, 1968); idem., “Literati Culture and Integration in Dai Viet, c.1430–c.1840;” idem., “Paperwork: The Rise of the New Literati and Ministerial Power and the Effort Toward Legibility in Dai Viet,” in G. Wade and L. Sun, eds., *Southeast Asia in the Fifteenth Century: The China Factor* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2010), 104–25; idem. “The Thirteenth Province: Internal Administration and External Expansion in Fifteenth Century Dai Viet,” in G. Wade, ed., *Asian Expansions, The Historical Experiences of Polity Expansions in Asia* (London: Routledge, 2015), 120–43; Nguyen Ngoc Huy, “The Ming Code in Vietnamese Legal History: Its Influence on the Vietnamese Codes and Other Legal Documents,” *Ming Studies*, 19 (1984), 46–86.
- 9 *Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu* (Hanoi: NXB Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 1998), XI, 35a; G.E. Dutton, J.S. Werner, and J.K. Whitmore, eds., *Sources of Vietnamese Tradition* (New York: Columbia Press, 2012), 107; Trần Văn Khê, *La musique vietnamienne traditionnelle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962), 29; E.S.

- Ungar, "Vietnamese Leadership and Order: Dai Viet Under the Le Dynasty (1428–1459)," Ph.D. Diss. (Cornell University, 1983), 220.
- 10 Whitmore, *Vietnam, Ho Quy Ly, and the Ming, 1371–1421*, chs. 4–5; idem., "Ngo (Chinese) Communities and Montane-Littoral Conflict in Dai Viet, ca. 1400–1600," 63–5.
- 11 Whitmore, "Chu Van An and the Rise of Antiquity in 14th Century Dai Viet," 50–61.
- 12 Whitmore, *Vietnam, Ho Quy Ly, and the Ming, 1371–1421*, ch. 6; Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese*, 174–80; Baldanza, *Ming China and Vietnam*, 65–71.
- 13 J.S.C. Lam, "Huizong's *Dashengyue*: a Musical Performance of Emperors and Officialdom," in P.B. Ebrey and M. Bickford, eds., *Emperor Huizong and Late Northern Song China: The Politics of Culture and the Culture of Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 395–452.
- 14 *Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu*, XI, 35b–36a; Dutton et al., *Sources of Vietnamese Tradition*, 107; Trần Văn Khê, *La musique vietnamienne traditionnelle*, 41; Ungar, "Vietnamese Leadership and Order: Dai Viet Under the Le Dynasty (1428–1459)," 221–3, 226–8. A late eleventh-century Vietnamese inscription from the southern province of Thanh Hoa spoke of such stone chimes: "To the southwest, there is a mountain, high and majestic, called An Hoach, in which is produced beautiful stone. This stone is a valuable possession of the public (royal) family. With a lustrous color like blue jade, dark in substance, it seems to produce a mist. So, thereafter, we chiseled it and made implements. These implements are carved into stone chimes which one strikes at different places, and for a thousand *li* there flows the sound." Inscription #11 in *Epigraphie en Chinoise du Viet Nam*, vol. I (Paris: EFEO; Hanoi: Vien Nghien Cuu Han Nom, 1998), 79, 83. On lithophones in Vietnam, see M. Adcock, "The Ancient Stone Instruments of Vietnam," *Time and Mind* 10 (2017), 23–37.
- 15 *Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu*, XI, 38b–39a; Dutton et al., *Sources of Vietnamese Tradition*, 107; Trần Văn Khê, *La musique vietnamienne traditionnelle*, 40–43; Ungar, "Vietnamese Leadership and Order: Dai Viet Under the Le Dynasty (1428–1459)," 223–5, 228.
- 16 *Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu*, XI, 46a–b; Dutton et al., *Sources of Vietnamese Tradition*, 108; Trần Văn Khê, *La musique vietnamienne traditionnelle*, 29–33. See also Rawski, "The Creation of an Emperor in Eighteenth Century China," 162–3, for the eight classes of sound and their instruments as well as Le Quy Don, *Van Dai Loai Ngu*, trans. (Hanoi: NXB Van Hoa Thong Tin, 1995 [1777]), II, 139, from eighteenth-century Dai Viet.
- 17 *Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu*, XI, 50b–51a. On Choson, see Provine, "State Sacrificial Music and Korean Identity," 5–9, and Evelyn S. Rawski, *Early Modern China and Northeast Asia: Cross-border Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 123–38.
- 18 *Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu*, XI, 47b–49a; Dutton et al., *Sources of Vietnamese Tradition*, 107–8; Trần Văn Khê, *La musique vietnamienne traditionnelle*, 40–41; Ungar, "Vietnamese Leadership and Order: Dai Viet Under the Le Dynasty (1428–1459)," 225, 228–30, 232–3.
- 19 Whitmore, "The Development of Le Government in Fifteenth Century Vietnam," chs. 2–5; idem., "Literati Culture and Integration in Dai Viet, c.1430–c.1840," 222–6; Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese*, 192–205; Ungar, "Vietnamese Leadership and Order: Dai Viet Under the Le Dynasty (1428–1459)," chapter 6.
- 20 Whitmore, "Paperwork: The Rise of the New Literati and Ministerial Power and

- the Effort Toward Legibility in Dai Viet,” 104–25; idem., “The Thirteenth Province: Internal Administration and External Expansion in Fifteenth Century Dai Viet,” 120–43; Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese*, 205–23.
- 21 *Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu*, XII, 8a–b; Whitmore, “The Development of Le Government in Fifteenth Century Vietnam,” 105–11.
- 22 *Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu*, XII, 51b–52a, 70a–b; XIII, 1a, 48b–49a; Dutton et al., *Sources of Vietnamese Tradition*, 109–10.
- 23 J.S.C. Lam, *State Sacrifices and Music in Ming China: Orthodoxy, Creativity, and Expressiveness* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998), chs. 2–3, 6–7; idem., “Imperial Agency in Ming Music Culture,” in D.M. Robinson, ed., *Culture, Courtiers, and Competition, The Ming Court, 1368–1644* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008), 277–94; R. Taylor, “Official Religion in the Ming,” in D. Twitchett & F.W. Mote, eds., *Cambridge History of China*, v. 8; pt. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 848–57; B. Yung, E.S. Rawski, and R.S. Watson, “Introduction,” in B. Yung, E.S. Rawski, and R.S. Watson, eds., *Harmony and Counterpoint, Ritual Music in the Chinese Context* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 3–7; Rawski, *Early Modern China and Northeast Asia*, 113, 128–29.
- 24 J.K. Whitmore, “Vietnamese Adaptation of Chinese Government Structure in the Fifteenth Century,” in E. Wickberg, comp., *Historical Interaction of China and Vietnam*, Institutional and Cultural Themes (Lawrence: Center for East Asian Studies, University of Kansas, 1969), 1–10.
- 25 Phan Huy Chu, *Lich Trieu Hien Chuong Loai Chi*, trans. (Hanoi: NXB Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 1992 [1821]), II, 30–31.
- 26 Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese*, ch. 5.
- 27 Le Quy Don, *Dai Viet Thong Su*, trans. (Hanoi: NXB Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 1978 [1749]), 265, 354; John W. Dardess, *Four Seasons: A Ming Emperor and His Grand Secretaries in Sixteenth Century China* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 19–26, 36–46.
- 28 *Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu*, XVI, 35a–b; XVII, 8a; J.K. Whitmore, “Chung-Hsing and Cheng-T’ung in Vietnamese Historiography in and of the 16th Century,” in K.W. Taylor and J.K. Whitmore, eds., *Essays on Vietnamese Past* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 115–36.
- 29 Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese*, chapter 6.
- 30 K.W. Taylor, “The Literati Revival in 17th Century Vietnam,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 18, 2 (1987), 1–23; *Le-Trieu Chieu-Linh Thien-Chinh* (Saigon: Nha In Binh-Minh, 1961 [c. 1705]), 166–67.
- 31 Lam, *State Sacrifices and Music in Ming China*, chs. 4, 6–7; idem., “Imperial Agency in Ming Music Culture,” 294–307; Taylor, “Official Religion in the Ming,” 842–5, 851–2, 857–61; Rawski, *Early Modern China and Northeast Asia*, 129; Dardess, *Four Seasons*, 19–26, 36–46.
- 32 Phan Huy Chu, *Lich Trieu Hien Chuong Loai Chi*, II, 31
- 33 Phan Huy Chu, *Lich Trieu Hien Chuong Loai Chi*, II, 31–33. For an early 1680s description of this ritual from an external, popular point of view, see Samuel Baron, “Ch. 14, Of the Ceremony of the King’s Blessing the Country, Vulgarly Amongst Them, Called Boua-Dee-Yaw [*Vua Di Giao*, The King Goes to the Suburban Sacrifice], or, According to Their Character, Can-Ja [*Can Gia*, Heaven’s Family],” in O. Dror, & K.W. Taylor, eds., *Views of Seventeenth Century Vietnam* (Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 2006), 259–61.
- 34 Province “State Sacrificial Music and Korean Identity,” 54–75; Rawski, *Early*

Modern China and Northeast Asia, 128, 131–37; Ji-Young Lee, *China's Hegemony: Four Hundred Years of East Asian Domination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 88.

- 35 For “the domain of manifest civility,” see Liam C. Kelley, *Beyond the Bronze Pillars: Envoy Poetry and the Sino-Vietnamese Relationship* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), 30–31, and for the court of Dai Viet relating to this domain, see J.K. Whitmore, “Northern Relations for Dai Viet: China Policy in the Age of Le Thanh-tong (1460–1497),” in James A. Anderson and J.K. Whitmore, eds., *China's Encounters on the South and Southwest, Reforging the Fiery Frontier Over Two Millennia* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 240–42, 248–52.
- 36 Whitmore, *Vietnam, Ho Quy Ly, and the Ming, 1371–1421*, ch. 5.
- 37 For records of the Vietnamese embassies, see *Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu*, X–XVIII; Phan Huy Chu, *Lich Trieu Hien Chuong Loai Chi*, III, 192–230; and Nguyen Thi Thao et al., *Su Than Viet Nam* (Hanoi: NXB Van Hoa-Thong Tin, 1996). For the official Ming view of embassies from Dai Viet, see G. Wade, *Southeast Asia in the Ming Shilu: An Open Access Resource* (Singapore: Asia Research Institute; E-Press, National University of Singapore, 2005) on the *Ming shilu* records of them. In contrast, Korean envoys made three or four regular visits a year to China's capital during the Ming (Lee, *China's Hegemony*, 40), plus special embassies. See Donald Clark, “Sino-Korean Tributary Missions Under the Ming,” in *CHC* 8, 279–80.
- 38 *Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu*, X–XII; Phan Huy Chu, *Lich Trieu Hien Chuong Loai Chi*, III, 192–200, 222–30; Nguyen et al., *Su Than Viet Nam*, 291–95.
- 39 Whitmore, “The Development of Le Government in Fifteenth Century Vietnam,” chs. 4–5; idem., “The Two Great Campaigns of the Hong-Duc Era (1470–1497) in Dai Viet,” *South East Asia Research*, 12.1 (2004), 119–36; Sun Laichen, “Ming-Southeast Asian Overland Interactions, 1368–1644,” Ph.D. Diss. University of Michigan, 2000, 259–67.
- 40 *Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu*, XII–XIV; Phan Huy Chu, *Lich Trieu Hien Chuong Loai Chi*, III, 200–01, 230–41; Nguyen et al., *Su Than Viet Nam*, 295–7.
- 41 Baldanza, *Ming China and Vietnam*, chapter 3; Dardess, *Four Seasons*, 167–71.
- 42 *Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu*, XIV–XVII; Phan Huy Chu, *Lich Trieu Hien Chuong Loai Chi*, III, 201–07, 241–4; Nguyen et al., *Su Than Viet Nam*, 297–9; Nguyen Trieu Dan, *A Vietnamese Family Chronicle* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 1991), 196–212.
- 43 For this embassy, led by the major scholar-official Phung Khac Khoan, see Baldanza, *Ming China and Vietnam*, chapter 7; Kelley, *Beyond the Bronze Pillars*, 75–7, 183–6, and Nguyen, *A Vietnamese Family Chronicle*, 201, 224–26.
- 44 *Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu*, XVII–XVIII; Phan Huy Chu, *Lich Trieu Hien Chuong Loai Chi*, III, 207–9; Nguyen et al., *Su Than Viet Nam*, 299–300; Nguyen, *A Vietnamese Family Chronicle*, 201, 225–6; Baldanza, *Ming China and Vietnam*, Pt. III. On this phase of the Ming loyalist resistance, see Xing Hang's chapter.
- 45 Whitmore, “The Development of Le Government in Fifteenth Century Vietnam”; idem., “Chung-Hsing and Cheng-T'ung in Vietnamese Historiography in and of the 16th Century”; N. Cooke, “Confucianization in Nineteenth-Century Vietnam: Evidence from the Palace Examinations (1463–1883),” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 25.2 (1994), 277–306.
- 46 I have checked the lists of ambassadors against those of the *Tiensi* (Ngo Duc Tho, ed., *Cac Nha Khoa Bang Viet Nam, 1075–1919*, Hanoi: Van Hoc, 1993) to determine, as best I can, the number of Vietnamese literati who traveled to Beijing.

Undoubtedly, other envoys were also scholars, but had never passed the top level of the examinations, so those I am discussing would have been the minimum number of scholars involved.

- 47 Taylor, "The Literati Revival in 17th Century Vietnam."
- 48 J.K. Whitmore, "'Elephants Can Actually Swim!': Contemporary Chinese Views of Late Ly Dai Viet," in D.G. Marr and A.C. Milner, eds., *Southeast Asia in the 9th to 14th Centuries* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1986), 121, 123.
- 49 For further analysis of the numbers of *Tiensi* who served as envoys in the different periods, see J.K. Whitmore, "Vietnamese Embassies and Literati Contacts" for the Association of Asian Studies Annual Meeting, Chicago, 2001.
- 50 Clark, "Sino-Korean Tributary Missions Under the Ming," 280.
- 51 Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*, 223, 551–52.
- 52 J.K. Whitmore, "The Tao Dan Group: Poetry, Cosmology, and the State in the Hong Duc Period (1470–1497)," *Crossroads*, 7.2 (1992), 55–70.
- 53 Taylor, "The Literati Revival in 17th Century Vietnam"; Whitmore, "Chung-Hsing and Cheng-T'ung in Vietnamese Historiography in and of the 16th Century," 130–31.
- 54 Kelley, *Beyond the Bronze Pillars*, chs. 2–6, describes in detail the physical and emotional as well as intellectual journeys undertaken by later Vietnamese envoys (mainly eighteenth–nineteenth centuries). Additional information on travel at the time may be found in John K. Whitmore, "Cartography in Vietnam," in D. Woodward & J.B. Harley, eds., *The History of Cartography*. Vol. 2, bk. 2 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 492 (fig. 10), 495–6, and pl. 30; Timothy Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 35–8, 43–50, 52–6; and F.W. Mote, *Imperial China, 900–1800* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 646–53. For maps of the routes, see Kelley, *Beyond the Bronze Pillars*, [xiv]; Baldanza, *Ming China and Vietnam*, 181; Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure*, 36; and Mote, *Imperial China, 900–1800*, 648. For a contemporary Korean description (1488) of a south to north route, see Ch'oe Pu, *Diary, A Record of Drifting Across the Sea*, John T. Meskill, ed. and trans. (Tucson, AZ: Association of Asian Studies, 1965). David M. Robinson "The Ming Court," in D.M. Robinson, ed., *Culture, Courtiers, and Competition, The Ming Court, 1368–1644* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008), 24–7, 32–4, 40, 45–6, places foreign envoys within the Ming capital and court.
- 55 On the anxiety, see Dutton et al., *Sources of Vietnamese Tradition*, 94–5, 238, and Kelley, *Beyond the Bronze Pillars*, 33–4. For the famous "brush chats" of Phung Khac Khoan and Yi Sugwang in the 1590s, see Kelley, *Beyond the Bronze Pillars*, 183–4, and Baldanza, *Ming China and Vietnam*, ch. 7, and for such an interaction with a Chinese scholar in the 1740s, see Kelley, *Beyond the Bronze Pillars*, 43–50.
- 56 Mote, *Imperial China, 900–1800*, 636.
- 57 Mote, *Imperial China, 900–1800*, 643.

CHAPTER 23

KOREAN EUNUCHS AS IMPERIAL ENVOYS

Relations with Chosŏn through the Zhengde reign



Sixiang Wang

INTRODUCTION

The usual way to describe Ming relations with Korea is through the notion of the “tributary system.” The Ming emperor, with the moral and cultural authority as a universal ruler of “all-under-heaven,” enforces a China-centered world order by investing foreign rulers as vassal-kings, with the expectation that they render obeisance through regular tribute missions. This formula for understanding pre-nineteenth-century diplomacy in East Asia has received its fair share of criticism since its influential scholarly articulation in the work of John King Fairbank.¹ But for being overly general, anachronistic, Sinocentric, reductively functionalist, and culturally essentialist, its hold on Ming-Korea

relations nevertheless remains tenacious. Its tenacity reflects in part the utility of the “tributary system” as an analytical framework for scholars and the malleability of tributary practices and institutions, which were used in flexible ways by both parties for domestic legitimation and foreign relations.² Korean embassies were also notable for the frequency, regularity, and intensity of participation in Ming tributary practices. They arrived in the Ming capital at least three times a year. Unlike most other groups along the Ming’s maritime and land frontier, the Korean court also professed (at least in the context of these embassies) shared cultural values and an ideological commitment to Ming claims of universal sovereignty. Both countries were administered by a Confucian elite who could communicate with one another through literary Chinese (also referred to as classical Chinese or literary Sinitic). In other words, whatever the faults of the “tributary system” as a descriptor in general, the Ming-Korea case seems to fit the bill as a “paradigmatic”, if one-of-a-kind, example of tributary relations, with Korea stereotyped as imperial China’s most loyal vassal.³

This stereotype has its origins in historical Chinese perceptions of what Korea meant for the imperial project. The primary narrative of Ming relations with Korea that could be gleaned from official imperial historiography concerns precisely matters of imperial legitimacy. When Korea appears in the laconic entries of the Ming *Veritable Records*, it is usually in the context of routine tribute embassies, especially those who arrived to participate in the New Year’s rituals. On the other hand, the detail regarding the few years of the Imjin War of 1592–98, when the Ming defended the Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910) of Korea against the invasion launched by the Japanese warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–98) contrasts starkly with the terse coverage of the preceding two centuries.⁴ The considerable attention devoted to the war is unsurprising, considering the Ming’s outlay of blood and treasure, though as scholars have argued, the expedition to rescue Chosŏn also sought to reaffirm a “Ming-centered world order.”⁵ These concerns are reproduced in the official Qing-compiled *Ming History*, which devotes an entire fascicle to the history of Ming relations with Korea. It largely reproduces the contours of Ming official sources, with a shared concern with imperial legitimacy extending into detailed coverage of how the Qing managed to replace the Ming as Korea’s tributary overlord.⁶

The prominence of these topics—dynastic transition, imperial legitimacy, and the Ming defense of Korea—reflect the historiographical concerns of the late imperial Chinese state, and revolve around the issue of Korea’s status as a tributary vassal. But it takes two to tango. Korea too played a part in shaping this relationship. As Ji-Young Lee has recently argued, the resilience of the Ming tributary institutions and

practices have as much to do with the domestic interests of the states and rulers who participated in it as it does with Ming imperial ambitions and cannot simply be reduced to a function of Ming imposition or the logical consequence of shared Confucian culture.⁷ While it is hard to gainsay the importance of relations with the Ming for Korea, the view from Chinese official historiography is a pale reflection of the total picture. The preoccupation with tribute as a function of Ming legitimacy occludes whole swaths of the diplomatic experience: practices of envoy poetry,⁸ cultural competition,⁹ Korean *realpolitik*,¹⁰ the importance of language interpreters,¹¹ the impact on Korean domestic politics,¹² and Korea's lateral relations with the Ming's other northeast Asian "tributaries": the Jurchens, Japanese, and Ryūkyūans.¹³ All in all, a much more in-depth and nuanced understanding of Ming-Korea relations have developed to not only challenge the once dominant, stereotypical view, but also broaden our understanding of how interstate relations operated in East Asia during the Ming period. Given the limitations of space, this chapter cannot provide a comprehensive discussion of the ramifications of these insights. What it will offer instead are snapshots of two facets of Ming-Korean interactions before the cataclysmic Imjin War, the value of envoy travel for the Korean court as a vehicle for information gathering and the role of Korean-born eunuchs as mediators between the Ming and Korean courts that will both complement and challenge the usual diplomatic history of this period.

MING-CHOSŎN RELATIONS AT A GLANCE: KOREAN MISSIONS TO BEIJING

When Zhu Yuanzhang expelled the Mongols from Dadu (Beijing) in 1368, Korea was ruled by the Koryŏ dynasty (918–1392). The rulers of Koryŏ had maintained a marriage alliance with the Mongols for nearly a century and its last kings were both *bona fide* members of the Mongol aristocracy as well as royal scions of Korea. Although early Ming relations with Koryŏ were peaceful, an assassinated Ming envoy, a regicide at the Korean court, border disputes, excessive Ming tribute demands, and the lingering presence of the Mongols in Manchuria were sources of instability. Relations deteriorated for the worse in 1388, when the Koryŏ launched an invasion of Ming-controlled Liaodong, but war was averted when the general charged with the attack mutinied, leading his troops to seize control of the Koryŏ capital instead. This general, Yi Sŏnggye (1335–1408, r. King T'aejo 1392–98), soon founded a new dynasty, and became the king of Korea in 1392.¹⁴

As Korea's new ruler, Yi Sŏnggye faced challenges at home and abroad. A military man from the north whose ancestors had served the Mongols for generations, Yi Sŏnggye lacked the genealogical credentials of the traditional Koryŏ aristocracy. As a usurper, he had to move quickly to eliminate pockets of domestic resistance. He sought external legitimation from the Ming, requesting patents of investiture from the Ming that would have recognized him as Korea's new ruler. He also invited the Ming emperor to choose from two options a new name for his state. The Ming emperor selected Chaoxian, or Chosŏn in Korean, calling it the "most beautiful name among the eastern barbarians."¹⁵ But, he remained mistrustful of Yi Sŏnggye, refusing to grant him investiture.¹⁶ Ming-Korean relations again lurched from one crisis to another until 1398, when the Ming emperor had died, spurring a succession dispute between the legitimate successor, Jianwen, and his uncle Zhu Di. In the same year, Yi Sŏnggye abdicated the throne in the wake of a palace coup, which paved the way for the accession of his son, Yi Pangwŏn (1367–1422, r. King T'aejong 1400–18) in 1400. Then in 1402 Zhu Di, victorious over his nephew, became the Yongle emperor, and from one usurper to another, granted the new king of Chosŏn royal robes, with patents of investiture to follow the year after, that confirmed him as Korea's ruler in the eyes of the Ming.¹⁷

In the decades to follow, Ming and Chosŏn exchanged envoys in moments of dynastic import. Korean emissaries arrived to present felicitations on imperial accessions and investitures, as well as condolences for imperial deaths. They also announced events pertaining to Korean dynastic succession: a new ruler, a new heir apparent, or a new queen. Each of these cases usually also involved a Ming embassy to Korea, either to proclaim developments in the Ming palace or to bequeath Korean royalty with patents of investiture and ceremonial robes, valued at the Korean court as symbols of royal legitimacy. But these embassies occurred only as frequently as the pace of dynastic succession would require them. The bulk of envoy travel fell on the shoulders of the Korean court, which timed three annual envoy missions to fit the Ming ritual calendar: the New Year, the emperor's birthday, and the birthday of the heir apparent.

The range of purposes an envoy mission served far exceeded the scope of these express ceremonial functions. A considerable number of Ming embassies, especially during the first decades, were to extract needed resources from Korea, notably oxen and horses, not simply tokens of symbolic fealty. The Chosŏn court also valued their missions to the Ming capital for much more than to seek political legitimacy and security assurances. While an envoy's official task in Beijing could be to present tribute and felicitations, his portfolio reflected a much wider

range of concerns.¹⁸ They often had to carry out specific orders. For instance, Sejong ordered his envoys to research Ming ceremonial regalia in 1437. By the sixteenth century, these practices became matters of routine. One member of the envoy mission, the Corrector (*chijönggwan*) was charged with investigating Ming ritual and institutional practices, as well as to consult Ming officials and literati regarding matters of classical scholarship.¹⁹ The travelogue of the Corrector for the 1576 embassy, Cho Hön (1544–92), reported his observations of Ming customs, institutions, and rituals. Impressed with China’s urban economic development as well as its cultural accomplishments, Cho highlighted aspects of Ming society worthy for Korean emulation.²⁰ But proposals for reforming Korean society along Ming lines were seldom taken-up wholesale. Even for the zealous Cho Hön, his search for Ming models was highly selective, reflecting his own philosophical and political agenda.²¹

Alongside this research, Chosön envoys eagerly sought out the newest Ming books.²² This bibliophilia generally impressed Ming observers, but in one case it raised an alarm. A Korean envoy had been discovered purchasing the *Gazetteer of the Great Ming Unification*, a geographical text court officials believed should not fall into foreign hands.²³ In general, book purchases were to augment the holdings of the government libraries, and thus focused on works of learning. One Chosön king, Yönsan’gun, however, also asked his envoys to indulge his interest in Chinese romances, by purchasing titles such as the *Story of the Western Chamber* (*Xixiang ji*) and the *Story of Alluring Crimson* (*Jiaohong ji*).²⁴

Korean court records documented these and other requests for exotic luxuries like lychee, longans, and betel nuts with disapproval.²⁵ Though maligned, they were only atypical because a *king* had asked for these particular objects. Yönsan’gun’s repeated demands that his envoys bring back “licentious and frivolous” goods were evidence of an unrestrained royal character, unfit for rule, and justified his later dethroning (a matter which will be discussed later in this chapter). Other kings made special orders before and after, while the journeys of their own officials were in part funded by trade in tropical commodities such as peppercorn.²⁶ Members of the embassy, envoy-officials, interpreters, and even their porters, profited from this opportunity for trade, despite royal injunctions against it. At times, even high-ranking court officials were caught abetting the smuggling of porcelains, books, and silks.²⁷

NEWS FROM THE MING: EMBASSIES AS

INTELLIGENCE GATHERING

Chosŏn envoys were also charged with intelligence gathering. Given the sheer number of individual envoy missions and resulting reports, the information collected was wide-ranging. Nevertheless, matters of war and peace, Ming imperial politics, and the presence of other tributary envoys were perennial concerns. The Yongle emperor's military expansion in Mongolia, for instance, caused a stir at the Korean court, as some Korean officials believed the Ming would turn to Korea afterward. Though a false alarm, the Chosŏn court remained wary of the Yongle emperor's penchant for "vainglory" and remained on the lookout for overweening imperial ambition.²⁸

In documenting the Ming's other foreign contacts, Chosŏn envoys also reported on the first European emissaries to arrive at the Ming court in 1516. The embassy, led by the Lisbon apothecary Tomé Pires (ca. 1465–1524) on behalf of the Portuguese king Manuel I, ended disastrously. The Portuguese had recently conquered Malacca and their aggressive presence in the South Sea led the Ming to suspect their intentions and eventually the expulsion of the Portuguese in 1523 and their subsequent exclusion from Chinese ports.²⁹ Before this dramatic denouement, Tomé Pires and his embassy remained in Beijing, where they encountered a Korean embassy.³⁰ In an audience with the Chosŏn king, the returning Korean emissaries identified them as envoys from the country of the "Franks" (Korean: *Pullanggi*, Chinese: *Folangji*), a usage derived from an Arab-Islamic convention for describing Christian Europe. The presence of these previously unknown foreigners, who arrived by sea from far Western reaches and traveled "three thousand leagues" overland to reach the capital, piqued the king's interest. He learned about their impressive books, which contained writing in "small script" that "resembled *dhāraṇī*" that is, the Sanskrit-derived letter forms used in esoteric Buddhist rituals. They were strange of appearance, wearing "goose down coats" and "wide trousers." They practiced the curious custom of monogamy, where even the "ruler . . . has [but] one queen and does not remarry even after her death." Their dietary habits were also puzzling. They ate "chicken and wheat products," which led the envoy to surmise that these must be the "sole produce" of their faraway country. According to the report, these "Frankish" envoys had complained about their shoddy lodging, which led the Ming Board of Rites to deny them an imperial audience for three years.³¹ Meeting such strange foreigners were rather exceptional; more common during a sojourn to Beijing were encounters with embassies from other civilized countries such as the Ryūkyūs and Vietnam, with whom Korean envoys occasionally exchanged poems and letters in classical Chinese.³²

Korean envoys also paid close attention to the shifting landscape of power at the Ming court. When envoys reported that the Grand Secretary Xia Yan (1482–1548), whose support Chosŏn envoys counted on,³³ had been impeached, the Chosŏn knew they had to work on his replacement, Yan Song (1480–1567).³⁴ Knowing that Yan held the keys to power, the Chosŏn valued the relationship with Yan and acceded to his requisitions for special gifts, in particular, for Korean memorial paper.³⁵ When Yan had rebuffed a Korean petition for revising sections of the *Ming Compendium* (Da Ming huidian) the Chosŏn found offensive, it dropped the issue, knowing full well attempting to circumvent him would have been fruitless.³⁶

As Korean emissaries kept an eye on the state of Ming politics, the Chosŏn became privy to court intrigue and palace coups, along with the personal moral failings of the Ming emperor. Korean envoy testimonies spoke of the scandal and violence that surrounded the nexus of imperial power. As historians of China have long noted, Chosŏn record-keepers, unconcerned with the taboos of *lèse-majesté*, had no compunction casting the imperial person or his rule in a negative light.³⁷ Chosŏn envoys related in gory detail the aftermath of the attempted coup by the palace eunuch Cao Jixiang in 1461. When this massive mutiny of Mongol military units in the Ming capital was suppressed, several thousand were dead with eight hundred executed by slicing. For the three next days, it rained, and “water, mixed with blood, flooded the forbidden palace.” The bloodshed, even if exaggerated, was a chilling reminder of the violence that lay behind imperial authority.³⁸

Reports detailing the carnage of Ming imperial politics are in good company. Even scandal from the emperor’s seraglio did not escape the Chosŏn court’s attention. The Yongle emperor requisitioned from Chosŏn several well-born women as concubines in his harem.³⁹ In 1424, upon the Yongle emperor’s death, a returning Korean envoy related the facts of these women’s gruesome demise. According to his informants, a Korean nurse who once served the Korean concubines and a Korean-born eunuch at the Ming palace, the women were implicated in a series of purges and massacres. A Chinese concubine by the name of Lü tried to befriend a Korean concubine, Lady Yŏ, by claiming virtual kinship with her on the basis of their shared surname (which though is pronounced differently in modern Korean and Chinese, are written with the same Chinese character). Lady Yŏ, however, snubbed Lü. The spurned Lady Lü sought vengeance against Yŏ by accusing her of poisoning another Korean concubine, Lady Kwŏn, causing her death. The emperor, who had favored Kwŏn, was enraged, and executed Lady Yŏ along with several hundred others, including many of the Korean palace ladies. Later Lü was discovered to have engaged in sexual

relations with palace eunuchs. The emperor questioned her servants under torture, who confessed to conspiring to assassinate the emperor. The Yongle emperor personally attended to their executions by dismemberment. In all, two thousand eight hundred individuals perished. Upon her demise, one palace woman cursed the emperor saying, “It was your own penis that shriveled, how could you have blamed [Lady Lü] for having an affair with a young eunuch?” When the Yongle emperor died, only two Korean concubines survived him, but they were forced to commit suicide to accompany the emperor in his grave.⁴⁰

These salacious details, while admittedly difficult to verify, escaped the confines of the inner palace, and traveled with envoys back to Korea to be preserved in the records kept by the Chosŏn’s court historians. Whatever one makes of the Chosŏn court’s “admiration” of Chinese high culture and political allegiance to the Ming throne, it entertained no romantic fantasies about the Ming. Chosŏn envoys had no qualms appraising the failures of Ming emperors and blamed them for the perceived devolution of court politics and Ming governance. Consider the ways in which they described the Zhengde emperor. Korean records describe him as “an immature and young ruler, who did not like listening to sound words.” They noted his neglect of government, refusing to hold court until well past noon, leaving his court officials to “wait outside until their feet froze.”⁴¹ One envoy remarked that the “emperor grew lazier by the day,” and did not hold court “more than once or twice a year.” Things had devolved to the point that whenever the envoy tried to ask the Chinese about contemporary affairs, they “covered their mouths and ran away,” unwilling to speak of such matters.⁴² Ming interpreters (*xuban*) who worked at the Huitong House, the hostel responsible for lodging foreign envoys, nonetheless divulged a few things here and there. The emperor now took up dressing as a Mongol warrior, complete with “felt caps, leather coats, robes, and socks” and ordered his eunuchs to role-play with him, “calling each other ‘barbarians,’” and “galloping around on horseback day and night, not returning [to the palace] for the whole evening.” When one loyal eunuch tried to reproach his ruler, the emperor answered, “you are by nature loyal and straightforward; it would be good if we sent you to a post to Nanjing,” and had him assassinated on the way. According to the report, after this incident, no one else dared remonstrate with the emperor.⁴³

From the emperor’s infatuation with a young catamite leading to disinterest in his harem, to the outbreak of rebellions led by imperial princes, reports of the Zhengde emperor’s troubled reign continued to flow into the Chosŏn court.⁴⁴ In the months before the boy-emperor’s

premature death in 1521, the Korean court even weighed the risks of the Ming's collapse, but the envoys assured the king the common people were not "especially worried or anguished" and "court officials still managed all affairs with utmost diligence."⁴⁵

Pithy appraisals of nearly every Ming ruler can be found in Korean sources. By and large, they do not depart far from how they are described in Chinese historical accounts. King T'aejo once described the Hongwu emperor to have "killed excessively," as even his "founding officials and important advisers could not preserve themselves."⁴⁶ His son T'aejong condemned the Yongle emperor's love of glory. The Chenghua emperor was notorious for giving his eunuchs free rein, while Zhengde could not cease with "childish games."⁴⁷ A Chosŏn high official went so far as to say that it was only "appropriate that a muddleheaded ruler" like Jiajing "suffered an assassination attempt."⁴⁸ The early Chosŏn court, its rulers, officials and historians would probably agree, more or less, with the appraisals of the sixteen emperors of the Ming dynasty by the American historian Sarah Schneewind.⁴⁹ They were "respectively, murderous, impractical, grandiose, sickly, licentious, vainglorious, improvident, doltish, hen-pecked, bibulous, self-indulgent, profligate, completely irresponsible, debauched, frivolous, and ineffectual." Yet, a resoundingly negative image of Ming rulers did not prevent the Chosŏn court from adhering to a diplomatic posture of reverence. One might then ask—why?⁵⁰ Was this outward presentation of reverence only an expedient means to avert Ming intervention in Korean affairs?

The reasons are complex. In part the diplomatic framework built over the years had worked well enough to provide the political legitimacy, cultural and economic access, and security guarantees the Chosŏn court desired. It may not be very accurate, however, to reduce the meaning of Korean participation to any one of the above priorities. Nor should Korean participation in the Ming tribute system be understood as simply a matter of cultural attraction or ideological commitment. While it is true the Chosŏn courtiers and rulers alike turned to Ming examples as a source of authority for their arguments, they served more as case examples of statecraft in action, rather than a model for unqualified emulation. During one royal lecture in 1509, King Chungjong's advisers described their own experiences from traveling to Ming Beijing. One named Sŏng Hŭiyŏn (1461–1513) recounted a case when a Ming high-official was punished with severe beatings over a minor offense. Lamenting the excessiveness of Ming punitive measures, Sŏng then implored the king to exercise leniency when it came to the punishment of his own officials. In the same lecture, Sŏng praised the Ming's use of a systematic mechanism for assessing the merits and accomplishments of

court officials. A subtext of the censure of Ming imperial excesses were veiled criticisms against the abuses committed by Korea's own rulers.⁵¹ Ultimately such discussions were tied up, first and foremost, with Korean concerns. Pressure for reform according to a Ming example could always be deflected with a simple acknowledgment that "there is much in [Korea] that does not follow the institutions of the Chinese—there is no need to change everything."⁵²

KOREAN EUNUCHS AS IMPERIAL EMISSARIES

One institution that Chosŏn envoys regularly condemned was the employment of eunuchs in Ming government.⁵³ Their condemnations were also accompanied by glimmers of *schadenfreude*. When discussing the overweening influence of the eunuch dictator Liu Jin (1451–1510), a Chinese scholar once asked a Korean envoy: "how does your country treat eunuchs?" The envoy answered proudly that "they are only in charge of cleaning and sweeping," a remark that supposedly "earned the unceasing praise" of his interlocutor.⁵⁴

The Korean envoy downplayed the position of eunuchs in the Korean palace, whose role was indeed minor when compared to the prominence of Ming eunuchs. Like in the Ming, these castrated men were primarily entrusted with serving and safeguarding the monarch's harem, but in the Ming they were also administrators, imperial tutors, ritual specialists, military officers, soldiers, and diplomats. The seafarer Zheng He, with his many voyages to the Indian Ocean, was but the most famous of these eunuch-diplomats.⁵⁵ Often, eunuchs were sent to their place of cultural or ethnic origin. Korea was no exception. Many of the eunuch emissaries the Ming sent there were natives of Korea.⁵⁶

The documentary record of Ming-Korean diplomacy, with its epistles, poetry anthologies, and travelogues, resulted from exchanges between Ming literati officials and their Korean counterparts, but they reflect poorly the social constitution of Ming diplomacy for most of the fifteenth and early sixteenth century.⁵⁷ From 1392 to 1469, the period of highest diplomatic activity between the Ming and Chosŏn, eunuchs led 63 out of 105 Ming embassies, while literati officials only led 22. The bulk of the diplomatic burden fell on the shoulder of the eunuchs of the inner palace.⁵⁸ Their value to the Ming emperor was their awareness of local conditions, which presumably included competence in the local language, but this competence was not universal. One Sin Kwisaeng was mistaken for a Chinese because he refused to speak Korean. Taken for arrogance, this refusal may very well have been due to lack of ability. Sent as tribute to China often as young boys, they might not retain or

develop skills in Korean. Indeed, some clearly depended on Chinese-speaking Korean interpreters employed by the Korean court during their travels to Korea.⁵⁹

The presence of Korean eunuchs at the imperial court was in part a Mongol legacy. Under the Mongol empire, many Korean elites, including the royal family, intermarried with the Mongols. When Korean women entered the households of Mongol aristocracy, which included the imperial harem, they were also accompanied by their servants from Korea. The chief consort of China's last Mongol emperor was a Korean woman, Empress Ki (fl. 1340–68), who had at her beck and call a vast number of eunuchs, including her favorite, a Korean named Pak Bukha.⁶⁰ When Zhu Yuanzhang reached Beijing in 1368, the Mongol imperial entourage fled in haste, leaving behind much of the palace personnel. Among them were Korean eunuchs who continued to serve the Ming. In 1395, the Ming emperor allowed those who were still alive to retire, repatriating them to their home country, Korea.⁶¹ In the meantime, Chosŏn Korea continued to send intermittent tribute of castrated boys to supply the Ming court with fresh personnel.⁶²

When some returned to Korea as official envoys, they were often tasked with the procurement of tribute. This included not only exotic goods, but also human tribute in the form of young women and more eunuchs. The Yongle emperor, dissatisfied with the three thousand castrated prisoners-of-war from Vietnam whom he called “muddle-headed and stupid”, tasked a Korean-born envoy to Chosŏn to procure three or four hundred eunuchs who were “bright and quick-witted and ready to be employed.” The Chosŏn court king balked at the request, remarking that “such objects do not sprout from seeds; how can we get so many,” and only sent only twenty-nine to the Ming. A human tribute responsible for procuring more of his kind, the Korean eunuch represents well the extractive practices of the Ming empire.⁶³

SERVANTS OF TWO MASTERS: THE KOREAN EUNUCH AS MEDIATOR

As their personal slaves, the eunuchs of emperors were often charged with tasks the emperors wished to conceal from the civil bureaucracy. The Chosŏn court suspected the Xuande emperor to have done as much when he sought Korean women for his harem.⁶⁴ By relaying oral edicts, rather than proclaiming written declarations, a eunuch could execute orders with no paper trail.⁶⁵ But it was precisely their position as agents of the emperor, as opposed to members of literati-dominated civil

bureaucracy, that made them useful for the Chosŏn court. At times when the Ming bureaucracy proved intractable toward Chosŏn demands, a Korean eunuch with strong ties to the emperor and his household could resolve them by circumventing the usual bureaucratic channels.⁶⁶ Although the emperor's slave, the Korean eunuch also mediated Chosŏn's relationship with the Ming.

The loyalties and motivations of Korean-born eunuchs were the subject of suspicion. As natives of Korea in Ming service, their persons were contested by overlapping sovereign claims. In 1468, one Ming official in Liaodong, Hou Ying (1430-?) wrote the following in a memorial to argue for why the practice of employing Korean eunuchs as envoys should cease:

The eunuchs Chŏng Tong and Ch'oe An have gone to Chosŏn to invest [the new Chosŏn king] . . . but they are both people of Chosŏn. Their ancestral graves, parents, brothers, and relatives are all in that land. When meeting the king, it would be difficult for them not to prostrate before him and ask him for favors. This greatly belittles the prestige of the Central State [the Ming].⁶⁷

Hou's proposal to cease employing Korean eunuchs in diplomacy was accepted, but the injunction was clearly not observed. Korean-born eunuchs continued to serve as emissaries for several decades until 1521. Hou's observations of the subtle relationship these eunuchs had with their two "masters," the Ming emperor and the Chosŏn king, were nevertheless astute.

Korean eunuchs did behave differently from their Ming literati counterparts. All Ming envoys took a superior position when proclaiming imperial edicts, for in such a ritual context, the envoy stands not as himself, but the vehicle of the emperor's voice. When the ceremony concluded and the imperial edict was received by the Chosŏn king, so too the imperial aura around the envoy dispersed. In the more informal court audiences that followed, Ming literati envoys usually took a position of parity with the Chosŏn king. In contrast, the eunuch Chŏng Tong offered to relinquish his ritual position, and insisted the Chosŏn king occupy a position of symbolic superiority: facing south. The Chosŏn king declined, and insisted that their proposal was a "breach of precedent." Chŏng insisted that the king "face south" and he "face north" because they, as "commoners native" to Chosŏn, should observe the rites of "ruler and subject." The Korean eunuchs then remained "prostrated on the floor" until the Chosŏn king reluctantly accepted the ritual elevation as his sovereign.⁶⁸ Another envoy, Kang Ok, insisted on the same, exclaiming that he "was but a slave of this country, whose flesh and bone are all gifts of his majesty's grace. In his

reasoning, the “public ritual” performed in the main palace halls had already concluded; now that they were in the king’s private chambers, a “private ritual” where he was to make personal obeisance to the Korean king was to take place.⁶⁹ Explained as expressions of affinity to native place, ritual deference to the Korean king (“We were originally commoners of this land, please allow us to kowtow to Your Majesty”) may have been rooted in genuine sentiments, or at least a recognition of the Korean ruler’s importance to their interests.⁷⁰ King Sejo, for instance, personally selected the boys who were to go to the Ming as eunuchs. One, the eunuch Kim Po, credited the king’s graces for his “fortune” of being able to serve the emperor and return home in glory as an imperial emissary.⁷¹

Despite these professions of fealty, these eunuchs’ relationship with their home country was ambivalent. When Kang Ok and Kim Po returned to Korea for the first time in 1468 as imperial emissaries, the Chosŏn court reunited them with their surviving family members in the capital.⁷² When the relatives arrived, the court granted these relatives a variety of requests—ranging from speedy and favorable conclusions to lawsuits, amnesty from prior legal violations, to reprieve from corvée obligations—all to ingratiate themselves with the Ming emissaries.⁷³ But the day of reunion made for a bittersweet homecoming. Kang Ok learned from two surviving relatives that his mother had died fourteen years ago, a discovery which led him to “weep bitterly without end.” Kim Po received his father and older brother at his hostel in Kaesŏng, but he refused to entertain his three uncles, blaming them for inciting his father to abandon his mother.⁷⁴ About two weeks later, Kim Po’s mother arrived in the capital. Kim went to pay his respects, the two “held each other and wept with overwhelming bitterness.” He assured his mother that her suffering would soon end, because the king was willing to grant his older brother an official salary and they no longer had to live with his father who “now loved his second wife.” He then scolded his father: “you have treated my mother so poorly, but today you drink my wine. Are you not ashamed?” In his fury, he then turned to his ten-year-old half-brother, the child of his hated stepmother. He slapped the child repeatedly, while swearing to bring the child to the palace in Beijing, presumably as a eunuch. But in the chaos the boy ran away and could not be found.⁷⁵

To take the boy with him, Kang would have needed to make the request to the Chosŏn king. Had the boy not escaped (and thwarted his older brother Kang Ok’s chance at retribution), the king would have likely granted the request, for the Chosŏn court disbursed numerous favors to the eunuchs and their families. These included building or repairing their families’ residences, titles of nobility for deceased parents

and ancestors, official posts and stipends to living relatives, and pilgrimages to the sacred Diamond Mountains (Kūmgangsan).⁷⁶ This generosity owed at least in part to the value these imperial emissaries had for the Chosŏn court. For this particular Chosŏn king, Sejo, good relations with the Ming inner palace was crucial for the success of the coup d'état that led to his accession and the concealment of this reality from the Ming court.⁷⁷ For his grandson, King Sŏngjong, the access granted to the inner palace through these Korean-born eunuchs served him well in managing a series of political challenges, including a troublesome Ming trade embargo on the export of buffalo horns, a critical raw material for manufacturing war bows.⁷⁸ Sustaining this useful relationship of course was not simply lingering native loyalties, but also what the Chosŏn court could offer.

Perhaps most valued by these eunuchs was a contribution towards their position in the Ming palace hierarchy. Excluded from the civil bureaucracy, their sole avenue of advancement was through ingratiating themselves with the emperor and his family, an effort which the Chosŏn court abetted. The procurement of exotic tribute goods, such as hunting birds are a case in point. Early Ming emperors, fond of the hunt, desired birds of prey, especially the gyrfalcon (*Falco rusticolus*), the largest of the raptors. According to the Korean king Sejong, these rare and magnificent birds were “valued as priceless objects, treasures of the first order in China.”⁷⁹ Known as *haidongqing* in Chinese, they were not perennial denizens of Korea, but migrated south from the Arctic Circle in the winter. Their capture required either the help of Jurchen tribesmen or the dispatch of experienced falconers to Korea's northeast frontier.⁸⁰ Once, in 1452, Chosŏn refused a Ming eunuch envoy's request for these birds and instead sent them to the emperor as a separate tribute, so that “they would be seen as gifts from Chosŏn,” and not the merit of the eunuch.⁸¹ Later that year, then only a Korean prince, the future King Sejo seized power through a *coup d'état*. With his eye on the throne, he proved more forthcoming to the demands from eunuch envoys whose cooperation he required. With no gyrfalcons on hand, he granted a white eagle to his guests as a “gift to the emperor.”⁸²

The gyrfalcon tribute, connected with the institution of the imperial hunt, was a controversial issue at the Ming court. Ming emperors, their eunuchs, and the civil bureaucracy had different opinions, with the latter protesting their propriety.⁸³ In 1467, following one such debate, an imperial edict arrived in Korea declaring: “Ever since We [the Chenchua emperor] acceded to the throne, We have already proclaimed to all places prohibiting tributes of flowers, trees, birds and beasts. What more of white pheasants, prodigious objects, and gyrfalcons, used as hunting birds?” and ordering King Sejo to refrain from sending such tribute.⁸⁴

Dubious of the Ming court's sincerity, Sejo ordered local officials in the northern frontier to make "advance preparations" in case the tribute was to be renewed, even as he dispatched an emissary to offer thanks for the tribute reprieve.⁸⁵

The Ming had "canceled" such tribute several times before, only to reinstate it afterward.⁸⁶ One year later, when the eunuchs Kang Ok and Kim Po arrived, they made demands, not for gyrfalcons *per se*, but other kinds of animals: lynxes, yellow hawks, and hunting dogs.⁸⁷ When a Korean official rebuffed the request, citing the imperial edict prohibiting tribute of exotic fauna, the two envoys offered conflicting responses. Kang Ok insinuated this prohibition could be safely ignored, but his assistant Kim Po apologized, professing ignorance of the imperial orders. But when the date of their return approached, the two envoys stalled, leading the court to suspect they were still waiting for these items as parting gifts.⁸⁸ Several days later, when Sejo offered to capture these animals for him, Kang Ok was "overjoyed" but citing the prohibition against presenting "birds" in particular, declined the offer of gyrfalcons.⁸⁹ Meanwhile, Kim Po explained to the king in private that the whole procurement trip was Kang Ok's idea, an attempt to ingratiate himself with the emperor. He advised the king to observe the prohibition against tributes of "rare birds and strange beasts," lest the "Central State [the Ming] look down upon *our* country," that is, Korea.⁹⁰

Rather than acting in concert, the two envoys undercut one another, a dynamic likely representative of the frequently contentious relationship between individual eunuchs. When Kang Ok returned to Korea in 1480, this time as an assistant emissary, his designs were again undermined by a colleague. This time it was his superior, the chief emissary Chŏng Tong. Chŏng claimed it was he, not Kang, who truly represented the emperor's personal wishes, which had been "deliberately concealed" from Kang.⁹¹ Their rivalry soon erupted dramatically, and the Chosŏn court found itself interceding to mediate in Kang and Chŏng's tattered relationship.⁹²

The extent to which the Chosŏn court colluded with these eunuchs became a sore issue for the Korean officialdom. They protested what they saw to be the disbursement of emoluments and titles to undeserving men of lesser social standing. They also objected to the court's tactic of using imperial eunuchs as proxies.⁹³ When the eunuch Chŏng Tong found that, in the wake of such protests, the Korean king proved reluctant to grant his requests, he voiced his grievances, reminding the king of how hard he had worked on the king's behalf in the past:

How could the king know about all the things I've done for our country? How can

the high officials [of Chosŏn] know about them? Only heaven knows! The other day, during the banquet, I fell to tears—it was not for any other reason, but that the king had thought [acceding to my wishes] would break the rules of his court. But if we say that I am breaking the rules, what about the requests that this country has made [of the Ming]? Are they all in accordance with the rules? We could say that the rules of the Ming court have also been broken!

He certainly believed that, given all he had done for the Chosŏn court, he deserved to be better treated:

The other day, during the banquet, [the king] gave me only ten boar skins and one lamp. How can a king give gifts like this? If it was only about me, that would be fine. But how would I look in front of all [my underlings]? This must be because the king finds me annoying. Even if I am annoying—just look at how the previous kings treated [the other Korean eunuchs] Chang Kŭn (fl. 1401) and Yun Pong (fl. 1440), who came year after year to ask for gyrfalcons. Now that His Majesty treats me this way, I don't really want to help him with all the favors he asked of me.⁹⁴

The court was livid at the eunuch's "irreverence," but King Sŏngjong ultimately bent to Chŏng Tong's pressure, because soon an imperial edict arrived from the Ming to demand an even more exorbitant tribute. The items included a vast array of animal and plant products, including ornate ivory carvings to be crafted to exacting specifications, items that the Korean court had no ability to furnish. The Chosŏn court suspected that these imperial requests were most likely a result of Chŏng's own machinations, for now he agreed to "do his best" to help "reduce" the tribute quantity, "however difficult it may be."⁹⁵ Though the Chosŏn court repeatedly lamented Chŏng's "greed," believing that the Ming's literati-officials would never stoop to such lows,⁹⁶ the fact was, as Chŏng described it and now reminded them, their relationship was reciprocal and symbiotic, if costly and unnerving.⁹⁷ The link to the inner palace that the Korean eunuchs provided again proved critical in the aftermath of the *coup d'état* of 1506 that deposed the king Yŏnsan'gun in favor of his younger brother, for it was the "lobbying" efforts of Korean eunuchs in Beijing that ensured the arrival of Ming patents of investiture for the new king, despite the air of suspicion that hung over the succession.⁹⁸ When these eunuchs returned to Chosŏn as emissaries in 1508, they were none too shy about demanding recompense for their "merits."⁹⁹

EPILOGUE: END OF AN ERA

One of the eunuchs the Chosŏn court relied on to conceal the Yŏnsan'gun affair was Chin Ho (fl. 1506–22). He was sent to Beijing as tribute, at the age of seven, in 1483. Neither he nor the Chosŏn court

knew it at that moment, but Chin and the eighteen other boys selected were the last contingent of Korean human tribute to the Ming court.¹⁰⁰ The cessation of human tribute has been viewed as a major turning point in Chosŏn-Ming relations. Without new tributes of castrated boys to the Ming palace to replenish their dwindling numbers, Korean eunuchs completely disappeared from the historical stage. Ming-Chosŏn diplomacy in 1580 would look very different from that in 1480. This difference has been seen as evidence of a transition from a period characterized by arbitrary imperial exactions to one of stable relations, rationalized and routinized by ritual, protocols, and the force of precedent.¹⁰¹

The transition was, however, less stark than such characterizations may initially suggest. It was a gradual one accompanied by other shifts, such as the growing importance of literary exchange in diplomacy, that were accretions of smaller, piecemeal institutional changes. Human tribute did not end because of Hou Ying's memorial against the employment of Korean eunuch envoys (as the Ming *Veritable Records* would suggest), but rather due to a convergence of several contingencies. One factor was the growing role of envoy poetry and literary exchange in the diplomatic arena. While the Ming continued to dispatch eunuch envoys to Korea, especially for rituals of investiture at the Chosŏn court, they were often over-shadowed by their literati assistants.¹⁰² For instance, Wang Xianchen (fl. 1493), a scholar-official from Suzhou, later famed for building the renowned Humble Administrator's Garden (*Zhuozheng yuan*), a center of late Ming Suzhou literati life (and, now, a modern tourist attraction), went to Korea in 1495 as the third-ranking assistant envoy to a Korean-born eunuch charged with investing Yŏnsan'gun as king. In Korea, he took the spotlight as a pedantic ritualist, who insisted on conforming Korean diplomatic ceremonies to his exacting and idiosyncratic standards.¹⁰³ During the reign of the Hongzhi emperor (1488–1505), eunuch influence waned, but the reign of his son, Zhengde (1506–21), saw a resurgence in their imperial patronage, and their power. Chin Ho's 1483 class of Korean tribute eunuchs had by that time matured to occupy important positions in the Ming inner palace. Thirty-five years later, Chin Ho, and his assistant Kim Ŭi returned to Chosŏn in the winter of 1521, which unbeknownst to them was the Korean eunuch mission to Korea, an event to bookend an era.

The mission had come about as result of the Zhengde emperor's investigation into "precedents from the Xuande reign" concerning the reception of Korean envoys. Before the investigation had concluded, Chin Ho alerted a visiting Korean embassy to the emperor's project, and warned that he would likely discover that his great-great grandfather,

the Xuande emperor, once acquired concubines from Korea. The news alarmed the Chosŏn envoys, for it raised the possibility that the Zhengde emperor would seek to reinstate the tribute of palace women.¹⁰⁴ It is unclear whether all this was part of Chin Ho's plan, as the Chosŏn envoys suspected, but indeed, several months later, Chin set off to Korea bearing a decree that demanded eunuchs, female cooks, and virgins for the imperial harem.¹⁰⁵ But only days after the mission's departure from Beijing, the young Zhengde emperor died in a boating accident, a fact Chin relayed to a Korean interpreter upon their arrival at the Chosŏn border.¹⁰⁶ He explained he divulged this information only because he was "as a native of Korea," but cautioned the interpreter to keep the matter a secret from the rest of the Ming embassy. He then proceeded to Seoul with the dead emperor's orders in tow.¹⁰⁷

With knowledge of the emperor's death, the Chosŏn court tarried, anticipating the edict's revocation. In the meantime, how much and what to comply with remained an open question.¹⁰⁸ King Chungjong recognized that the "eunuchs of our country (Korea)" had often "been of aid in matters at the Central Court." With only but a "few remaining" from the 1481 contingent, sending more tribute was the only way to have these valuable contacts in the Ming palace.¹⁰⁹ Sending women for the palace, however, was another matter. This "preposterous order of the deceased emperor" required a temporary prohibition of marriage for the selection of tribute virgins—a great nuisance to the population. Chungjong's officials exhorted the king to refuse this particular demand.¹¹⁰ Meanwhile, the eunuch envoys sent contradictory signals, both insisting compliance to all the demands and insinuating the Chosŏn court could still act according to its own discretion.¹¹¹

The Chosŏn court hesitated not because it faced limited options, but rather because it had a surfeit of them. It wished to proceed from a morally and ritually unassailable position. As for where it should lie—that was unclear. The instructions of an imperial edict were in theory inviolable; however, the emperor who had promulgated it was now dead, which meant his orders might yet be rescinded. To continue with the unpopular procurement would not only be unnecessary, but would also call attention to the moral faults of the deceased emperor. King Chungjong desired a consensus of opinion that was not easily reached. Some officials argued that, by acceding to a portion of the imperial demands, it had no grounds to refuse the rest. Other officials questioned the propriety of presenting women for a dead emperor's harem during the period of his mourning. Neither could Chosŏn excuse itself on grounds of ignorance, for it had already dispatched envoys to the Ming to express condolence. Still others insisted it would be best to follow the imperial edict to the letter, preposterous as it was. After an extended

debate over the primacy of political expediency and ritual rectitude, the king finally decided that fifteen women between the age of thirteen and seventeen would be selected, with the expectation that the procurement would be canceled.¹¹²

The aforementioned condolence emissaries, while *en route* to Beijing, learned that another envoy sent by the Ming military commander across the border was on its way to Korea. The Chosŏn emissaries dispatched their own messenger to Seoul to inform the court of the envoy's intent. They presented a verbatim copy of the Ming edict, which contained orders for the Ming commander to arrest Kim Ŭi and Chin Ho. The edict accused the two eunuchs of "ignoring the gravity of the imperial mission, being unbridled in their greed, conspiring for profits beyond established precedent, [and exploiting] foreign barbarians to indulge in their own pleasures," among other crimes. Lest the "eastern barbarians [i.e. Koreans] are disappointed" and develop "sentiments of condescension" toward the imperial court, the envoys were to be apprehended in "chains and manacles" with their baggage seized and escorted back to Beijing for "severe punishment." The Chosŏn court decided to conceal the matter from their Ming guests, but showed them a heavily redacted version to insinuate that the imperial court expected their immediate return.¹¹³

Unaware of their imminent arrest, they still dallied, and pressed the Chosŏn court to make good on their earlier requests. Although some officials suggested that the Chosŏn court apprehend the Ming envoys, others argued that it would be better to accede to their requests for the time being, and treat them no differently than before.¹¹⁴ King Chungjong agreed. The language of the imperial edict notwithstanding, there was no way to know whether they would in fact be severely punished upon their return. The eunuchs, if they remained in power, would then only resent their ill-treatment and slander Chosŏn to the new emperor in revenge.¹¹⁵

The decision to treat them deferentially proved judicious. The Liaodong commander, likely unwilling to make a commotion in lands beyond his jurisdiction, did not attempt to apprehend the Ming envoys, but tried instead to coax them to return. When the Chosŏn court finally received formal notices for recalling Chin and Kim from the Liaodong commander, there was no longer mention of their arrest. The procurement was canceled and the Ming envoys departed.¹¹⁶ True to the prediction of one Korean interpreter, who told the king that "Kim Ŭi and company will certainly escape punishment," the two eunuchs were shortly restored to their original posts.¹¹⁷ The Chosŏn court concluded that the Ming knew full well the two were acting under the emperor's

orders, and only scapegoated Chin Ho and Kim Ŭi to deflect blame for the deceased Zhengde emperor. By pretending the two had “falsified” the edict, it could be rescinded without implicating the Zhengde emperor.¹¹⁸ Though Chin and Kim continued to work at the Ming court, their attempt to acquire young Korean eunuchs to follow in their footsteps had failed. Neither Chin nor Kim returned to Korea after this incident. With the convergence of these contingencies—the Zhengde emperor’s sudden death, the indecision of the Chosŏn court, and the Ming court’s actions—the age of Korean eunuchs had come to an end.

Historiography has not been kind to Ming eunuchs in general. They have been blamed summarily for leading young and ambitious emperors on vainglorious military adventures, for manning a secret police apparatus intended to terrorize the scholar-official bureaucracy, and for the downfall of the dynasty itself.¹¹⁹ As seen in this chapter, Korean writings about Ming eunuchs, Korean or otherwise, are no less flattering and depict them as overbearing, indecorous, and greedy. Perhaps because eunuchs seldom have descendants to defend them, they serve as convenient scapegoats for endemic structural features of the Ming state or the excesses of imperial autocracy.

When it comes to foreign relations, one strand of interpretation treats the employment of eunuchs as an aberration of how a Confucian tributary relationship ought to function. As one modern historian put it, eunuchs “interfered” with politics, and acted against the spirit of their emperors, who repeatedly attempted to curtail their abuses.¹²⁰ Indeed, the extractive and exploitative practices associated with eunuch emissaries contrasts starkly with the professed Confucian ideals of Ming empire where “men afar” such as the Koreans, are supposed to be “cherished” (*rouyuan neng’er*) and turns on its head the principle of magnanimity where foreign emissaries are supposed to “arrive with little” but be sent off “with much” (Ch: *houwang bolai*). Such scapegoating, which portrays “unreasonable and arbitrary demands” as working “outside of the system”, shifts all moral hazard of extraction and coercion onto these eunuchs, conveniently preserving the “moral” tenor of the Ming diplomatic practice as an institution guided by “rituals and norms.”¹²¹ Of course these extractive practices, though rendered marginal when one adopts the gaze and values of Korea and China’s Confucian elite, were just as fundamental to Ming-Korea relations as the Confucian moral and political ideals that supposedly guided them. By the same token, the prominence of eunuchs in the Ming is better seen, not as a corruption of an ideal system (even if their Confucian literati rivals would like to think so), but as a function of Ming practices of empire and the economy of violence integral to them.¹²²

NOTES

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- 34 *Chungjong sillok* 100:62b [1543/05/08#1].
- 35 *Chungjong sillok* 100:73b [1543/06/10#4].
- 36 *Myōngjong sillok* 23:59b [1557/11/06#1]. Yan Song's reputation in Chosŏn was no less negative than the one he acquired in the Ming. For a discussion of Yan Song in Ming history, see Kenneth James Hammond, *Pepper Mountain: The Life, Death and Posthumous Career of Yang Jisheng* (London: Kegan Paul, 2007). For Chosŏn views on Yan, see *Myōngjong sillok* 14:10a [1553/02/21#2]; 24:70b [1558/10/20#1]; 25:16a [1559/03/05#1]; for the *Compendium* controversy, see Sun Weiguo, *Ming Qing shiqi Zhongguo shixue dui Chaoxian de yingxiangjinian lun liangguo xueshu jiaoliu yu haiwai Hanxue* (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 2009); Kwŏn Inyong, "Myōng chung'gi Chosŏn ŭi Chong'gye pyŏnmu wa tae Myōng oegyo," *Myōng-Ch'ōngsa yŏn'gu* 24 (October 2005), 93–116.
- 37 See for instance the introduction of Wu Han, *Chaoxian Lichao shilu zhong de Zhongguo shiliao* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980).
- 38 *Sejo sillok* 25:20b [1461/08/26#2]. For a discussion of this incident for the political and social context of this event, see David M. Robinson, "Politics, Force and Ethnicity in Ming China: Mongols and the Abortive Coup of 1461," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 59.1 (June, 1999), esp. 113–14.
- 39 David M. Robinson, "The Ming Court and the Legacy of the Yuan Mongols," in David M. Robinson, ed., *Culture, Courtiers, and Competition: The Ming Court (1368–1644)*, ed., (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2008); Clark, "Sino-Korean Tributary Relations under the Ming," 291–3.
- 40 *Sejong sillok* 26:15b [1424/10/17#2]; See *Sejong sillok* 68:10b [1435/04/28#2].
- 41 *Chungjong sillok* 5:21a [1508/02/03#3].
- 42 *Chungjong sillok* 8:19b [1509/04/04#2].
- 43 *Chungjong sillok* 10:15b [1509/11/18#1].
- 44 *Chungjong sillok* 10:58a [1510/03/18#3]; The Zhengde's emperor's "disinterest" in his harem has been blamed for precipitating a succession crisis when he died young and without an heir. See also *Chungjong sillok* 12:51a [1510/11/26#3]; 13:27b [1511.03.08#4]; 13:34b [1511/03/21#3] etc. For translations and detailed discussions of the Chosŏn portrayal of the Zhengde emperor, see David M. Robinson, "Disturbing Images: Rebellion, Usurpation, and Rulership in Early Sixteenth-Century East Asia—Korean Writings on Emperor Wuzong," *Journal of Korean Studies* 9. 1 (2004), 97–127.
- 45 *Chungjong sillok* 41:28a [1521/01/24#2].
- 46 *T'aejo sillok* 3:9b [1393/05/25#2].
- 47 *Sōngjong sillok* 88:3b [1478/01/11#1]; *Chungjong sillok* 5:21a [1508/02/03#3].
- 48 *Chungjong sillok* 99:62b [1542/11/17#1].
- 49 The Hongzhi emperor managed to escape Korean censure while enjoying a relatively positive reputation in historical memory. See *Chungjong sillok* 5:31a [1508/02/23#1].
- 50 Sarah Schneewind, *Community Schools and the State in Ming China* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 167.
- 51 *Chungjong sillok* 9:35a [1509/09/10#1].
- 52 *Chungjong sillok* 5:6a [1508/01/08#1].
- 53 For instance, the favor enjoyed by the eunuch military commander Wang Zhi 汪直 (?–1487) from the Chenghua emperor (r. 1465–87). *Sōngjong sillok* 134:6a

[1481/10/07#3].

- 54 *Chungjong sillok* 8:42b [1509/05/21#1].
- 55 Shih-shan Henry Tsai, *The Eunuchs in the Ming Dynasty* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), 119–42; Scarlett Jang, “The Eunuch Agency Directorate of Ceremonial and the Ming Imperial Publishing Enterprise,” in David M. Robinson, ed., *Culture, Courtiers, and Competition: The Ming Court (1368–1644)*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 116–85.
- 56 For example, Muslim eunuchs were sent to Muslim regions, Mongols to Mongolia, Jurchens to Liaodong. See Sun Weiguo “Lun Mingchu de huanguan waijiao,” *Nankai xuebao*, 2 (1994), 34–42; Chŏng Tonghun, “Myŏngdae chŏn’gi oegyo sajŏl ŭi sinpun chŏngmyŏng pangsik kwa kukkagan ch’egye” *Myŏng Ch’ŏng sa yŏn’gu* 10 (October 2013), 1–34.
- 57 Wang, “Co-Constructing Empire in Early Chosŏn Korea,” ch. 6; Philip de Heer, “Three Embassies to Seoul: Sino-Korean Relations in the 15th Century,” in Leonard Blussé and Harriet T. Zurndorfer, eds., *Conflict and Accommodation in Early Modern East Asia: Essays in Honour of Erik Zürcher* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993).
- 58 For a comprehensive list of Ming-Korean embassies, see Chŏng Ŭnju, *Chosŏn sidae sabaeng kirokhwa: yet kŭrim ŭro ingnŭn Han-Chung kwan’gye sa* (Seoul: Sahoe p’yŏngnon, 2012), 582–9.
- 59 *T’aejo sillok* 14:15b [1398/06/24#1]; Clark, “Sino-Korean Tributary Relations under the Ming,” 284; *Sŏngjong sillok* 130:4a [1481/06/09#1].
- 60 Robinson, “The Ming Court and the Legacy of the Yuan Mongols,” 382–6; See also David M. Robinson, *Empire’s Twilight: Northeast Asia under the Mongols* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).
- 61 *T’aejo sillok* 7:12b [1395/05/11#3]; 14:15b [1398/06/24#1]; *T’aejong sillok* 6:24a [1403/11/01#1]; 6:29b [1403/11a/17#1]; 7:23b [1404/06/02#2] etc.
- 62 *T’aejo sillok* 7:12b [1395/05/11#3]; 14:15b [1398/06/24#1]; *T’aejong sillok* 6:24a [1403/11/01#1]; 6:29b [1403/11a/17#1]; 7:23b [1404/06/02#2] etc.
- 63 *T’aejong sillok* 14:14b [1407/08/06#1]; *T’aejong sillok* 14:24b [1407/09/11]. Evidently the Yongle emperor did not find all his Vietnamese prisoners useless. One, Nguyễn An (1381–1453), designed and oversaw the construction of the new Ming capital, Beijing. Tsai, *The Eunuchs in the Ming Dynasty*, 203.
- 64 *Sŏngjong sillok* 99:17a (1478/12/23#1).
- 65 *Sŏngjong sillok* 132:6b [1481/08/10#1].
- 66 Cho Yŏngnok “Sŏnch’o ŭi Chosŏn ch’ulsin Myŏngsa ko – Sŏngjong cho ŭi tae Myŏng kyosŏp kwa Myŏngsa Chŏng Tong,” *Kuksagwan nonch’ong* 14 (1990), 118–27.
- 67 *Ming shi lu* Xianzong 61, 1253–4 [Chenghua 4 (1468/12/renzi)].
- 68 *Sŏngjong sillok* 129:13b [1481/05/22#1].
- 69 See *Sejo sillok* 46:6a [1468/04/13]. For other cases, see also *Sejong sillok* 68:9b [1435/04/26#3]; *Sejong sillok* 68:10a [1435/04/27#2].
- 70 *Sŏngjong sillok* 117:3b [1480/05/05#1]
- 71 *Sejo sillok* 45:42b [1468/03/27]
- 72 *Sejo sillok* 45:19b [1468/2/24#1]; 45:22b [1468/2/26#3].
- 73 *Sejo sillok* 45:26a [1468/3/2#5].
- 74 *Sejo sillok* 46:2a [1468/4/6#1].
- 75 *Sejo sillok* 46:7b [1468/4/17#1].

- 76 For examples of emoluments for ancestors see *Sejo sillok* 1:24a [1455/06a/24#], relatives and residences, *Sejo sillok* 45:22a [1468/02/26#3]; *Sejo sillok* 45:26a [1468/03/02#5]; *Sejo sillok* 45:34b [1468/03/23#4]; trips to Kŭmgangsang, *Sejo sillok* 46:5a [1468/04/10#5].
- 77 Wang, “Co-Constructing Empire in Early Chosŏn Korea,” 241–61.
- 78 Wang, “Co-Constructing Empire in Early Chosŏn Korea,” 127–32.
- 79 *Sejong sillok* 63:23b [1434/03/01#4].
- 80 Widely desired by royal courts all across Eurasia, their place as a Korean tribute item, along with maidens and eunuchs, had Mongol period origins. The Koryŏ king Ch’ungnyŏl (1274–1308) established a Falconry Agency to procure hunting birds as tribute for the Mongol emperor. The agency allowed him to centralize monarchical authority, as he installed officials personally loyal to it, and used it as a platform to conduct royal hunts. See Yi Ikchu [Lee Ik Joo], “Koryŏ Ch’ungnyŏl wangdae ŭi chŏngch’i sanghwang kwa chŏngch’i seryŏk ŭi sŏnggyŏk,” *Han’guk saron* 18 (1988), 155–222. Note the fourteenth-century Korean falconry manual, the *Ŭnggolbang* (Prescriptions for Hawks and Falcons). See Yi Usŏng and Anp’yŏng taegun *Kobon Ŭnggolbang oe ijong* (Seoul: Asea munhwasa, 1990). See also the Tianshun’ emperor’s edict demanding yearly tributes of three to seven gyrfalcons. *Sejo sillok* 19:2a [1460/01/04#4].
- 81 *Tanjong sillok* 3:23a [1452/09a/21#1, #2].
- 82 *Tanjong sillok* 14:18b [1455/05/07#1].
- 83 David M. Robinson, *Martial Spectacles of the Ming Court* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2013), 95–101.
- 84 *Sejo sillok* 41:19b [1467/03/10#3]. Note that this edict was meant as a gesture of magnanimity. Refusing exotic gifts was supposed to be a gesture of friendship. The language here presages the Qing Qianlong emperor’s famous gesture to Lord MacCartney in 1793. There, as was the case here, the point was not that the Chinese had no curiosity for the unknown and exotic, but that the emperor, by stemming his desires, had demonstrated his virtue. James Louis Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 225–49.
- 85 *Sejo sillok* 43:46b [1467/08/28#8]; 43:35a [1467/08/13].
- 86 Robinson, *Martial Spectacles of the Ming Court*, 98–9.
- 87 *Sejo sillok* 46:7b [1468/04/17#3].
- 88 *Sejo sillok* 46:8b [1468/04/19#1].
- 89 *Sejo sillok* 46:9b [1468/04/22#1].
- 90 *Sejo sillok* 46:9b [1468/04/22#1].
- 91 *Sŏngjong sillok* 118:17b [1480/06/25#2].
- 92 *Sŏngjong sillok* 118:18b [1480/06/26#3].
- 93 Wang, “Co-Constructing Empire in Early Chosŏn Korea,” 130–31; *Sŏngjong sillok* 88:4b [1478/1/12#1]; 88:5a [1478/1/13#1]; 88:6a [1478/1/15#2].
- 94 *Sŏngjong sillok* 119:10b [1480/7/17#5].
- 95 *Sŏngjong sillok* 136:2a [1481/12/7#2]; 136:2b [1481/12/7#3]; 136:7a [1481/12/22#1]; 149:16a [1482/12/24#2].
- 96 *Sŏngjong sillok* 116:6a [1480/04/21#3].
- 97 Korean eunuchs occasionally even furnished gifts for the king of their homeland. *Sŏngjong sillok* 56:5a [1475/06/05#6].
- 98 David M. Robinson, “Korean Lobbying at the Ming Court: King Chungjong’s

Usurpation of 1506: A Research Note,” *Ming Studies* 41.1 (1999), 42.

- 99 *Chungjong sillok* 6:22a [1508/06/16#5]. Not all Chosŏn officials approved the way the court dealt with Yŏnsangun’s overthrow, and believed it would have been better to lay bare “his villainies” to the Ming. See also 5:35a [1508/04/15#1].
- 100 *Sŏngjong sillok* 155:9b [1483/06/16#12]; 157:6a [1483/08/07#5]; 157:21b [1483/08/20#7].
- 101 Ye Quanhong, *Mingdai qianqi Zhong Han guojiao zhi yanjiu*: 1368–1488, 119–120.
- 102 Du Huiyue, *Mingdai wenchen chushi Chaoxian yu “Huanghuaji”* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2010), 183–95.
- 103 Craig Clunas, *Fruitful Sites: Garden Culture in Ming Dynasty China* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 23–40; 52–62. For activities of Wang in Korea, see entries in *Yŏnsan’gun ilgi* 5:20b–6:7b [1495/5/25#1]–[1495/6/7#1].
- 104 *Chungjong sillok* 41:28a [1521/01/24#2].
- 105 *Chungjong sillok* 41:57b [1521/04/29#2].
- 106 *Chungjong sillok* 41:47a [1521/04/10#3].
- 107 *Chungjong sillok* 41:49a [1521/04/13#3]; 41:49b [1521/04/15#1]; [1521/04/16#1].
- 108 *Chungjong sillok* 42:11a [1521/05/19#3].
- 109 *Chungjong sillok* 41:59b [1521/04/29#7]. See also 42:12b–42:13a [1521/05/20#2; #5].
- 110 *Chungjong sillok* 42:4b [1521/05/12#1].
- 111 *Chungjong sillok* 42:15a–42:16a [1521/05/21#1–2].
- 112 *Chungjong sillok* 42:19b–23a [1521/06/02#2]. There were other proposals as well. Some court officials suggested that the Chosŏn could dispatch an embassy to seek from the Ming a final confirmation of whether these orders were still valid, given the ritual incongruity of presenting women for a deceased emperor’s harem.
- 113 *Chungjong sillok* 42:36a [1521/07/06#1].
- 114 *Chungjong sillok* 42:43b [1521/07/10#1].
- 115 *Chungjong sillok* 42:43b [1521/07/11#1].
- 116 *Chungjong sillok* 42:46b [1521/07/15#4]; 42:47b [1521/07/16#2].
- 117 *Chungjong sillok* 42:47b [1521/07/16#2]; 44:22b [1522/03/14#2]. Chin Ho, especially, remained an important point of contact for the Chosŏn court after this affair and continued to work for Chosŏn interests at the Ming court. *Chungjong sillok* 53:29b [1525/03/07#3].
- 118 See Nam Kon’s discussion of the matter in *Chungjong sillok* 42:49a–b [1521/07/11#1]. The death of the Zhengde emperor led to the rise of a coterie of civil officials under the leadership of Yang Tinghe (1459–1529) who had sought to curtail the power of the inner palace by bringing in an outsider to the Ming throne, Zhengde’s cousin, Zhu Houcong (1507–67), who was the Jiajing emperor.
- 119 Tsai, *The Eunuchs in the Ming Dynasty*, 1–9, 59–63; John W. Dardess, *Blood and History in China: The Donglin Faction and Its Repression, 1620–1627* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2002), 141–5; 150–56; Harry Miller, *State versus Gentry in Late Ming Dynasty China, 1572–1644* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 121–38; Matthew Ernest Fryslye, “The Historian’s Castrated Slave: The Textual Eunuch and the Creation of Historical Identity in

the ‘Ming History’,” Ph.D. Diss., University of Michigan, 2001; For the long-standing influence of the clichés of the evil Ming eunuch on the subsequent Qing period, see Norman Alan Kutcher, *Eunuch and Emperor in the Great Age of Qing Rule* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018), 1–67.

- 120 Wang Wei, Yang Xiaolei, and Wu Zhenqing, *Zhong Chao guanxi shi: Ming Qing shiqi*, ed. Bai Xinliang (Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe, 2002), 96–101.
- 121 For an example, see Huang Zhilian, *Dong Ya de liyi shijie: Zhongguo fengjianwang chao yu Chaoxian bandao guanxi xingtai lun* (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 1994), 402–5; 258–9.
- 122 David M. Robinson, *Bandits, Eunuchs, and the Son of Heaven: Rebellion and the Economy of Violence in Mid-Ming China* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2001).

CHAPTER 24

WAR, COMMERCE, AND TRIBUTARY RELATIONS IN THE SINO-KOREAN BORDERLAND OF THE LATE SIXTEENTH CENTURY*



Masato Hasegawa

INTRODUCTION

Now that all under heaven is unified by the imperial court, the language that is used is Chinese. This Korean language of mine is only used in Korea. Once one has passed Ŭiju and reaches Chinese soil, Chinese is spoken everywhere. If someone asks [us] a question [in Chinese] and we can't answer it, what will others think of us [Koreans]?
1

Thus reads one of the opening passages of the Korean textbook of the Chinese language titled *Laoqida* or *Nogoltae* (Old China hand), which was first compiled in the late Koryŏ period and remained in use for official language training throughout the subsequent Chosŏn period (1392–1910). The revised late fifteenth-century edition of this textbook narrates a Korean merchant's journey to the Ming capital of Beijing, accompanied by two of his relatives and a neighbor.² At the beginning of

their commercial and cultural adventure, they meet a Chinese merchant surnamed Wang from Liaoyang and embark upon a months-long trip to trade in horses and other items in the vibrant commercial environment of the Ming capital. As our nameless Korean protagonist crosses the Yalu (or Amnok) River through Korea's border city of Üiju, or so he recalled as he spoke to his unexpected Chinese companion, there was no doubt in his mind that he had set foot on Chinese land, for everyone was speaking the Chinese language, not his native Korean.

The *Laoqida* presents a neatly constructed worldview and draws a clear boundary between China and Korea along the Yalu River. The symbolic significance of the Yalu River as a border was indeed underscored by the Ming as early as the reign of its founder Zhu Yuanzhang (r. 1368–98). After Yi Sönggye (r. 1392–98) founded the Chosön dynasty in Korea in 1392, Chosön officials also regarded the Yalu River as a boundary between the Ming and the Chosön. But a large section of eastern Liaodong remained mostly uninhabited during the early years of the Ming, and settlements between the city of Liaoyang and the Yalu River only appeared gradually.³ By the mid-fifteenth century, however, a sizable number of Koreans had emigrated to this previously uninhabited area to escape hardships in P'yöngan Province.⁴ The Chosön official Yang Söngchi (1415–82), for example, noted in 1464 that three out of ten people in Liaodong were Koreans.⁵ Another official, Kim Kwan (1425–85), reported during an audience with King Söngjong (r. 1469–94) in 1484: “As I observed the people of the East Eight Post Stations [between Liaoyang and the Yalu River], many of them understood our language. I suspect that they are commoners of our country who have deserted.”⁶ Four years later, yet another official, Ch'ae Su (1449–1515), stated upon his return from Beijing: “Everyone [in the East Eight Post Stations] understands our language, and they are no different from the people of P'yöngan Province.”⁷

When situated in the socio-political context of the Ming period, the *Laoqida* also raises intriguing questions about the nature of commerce in the border region between China and Korea. While its narrative structure first took shape prior to the founding of the Ming dynasty in 1368, one wonders how reflective the *Laoqida* is of the manner in which Chinese and Korean merchants were traveling in the Ming period. The period saw an important change in the nature of commerce in China, and the emergence of what Timothy Brook calls “a more mobile and more commercially active world” had ripple effects beyond China's borders.⁸ According to a passage in the *History of the Koryö* (*Koryösa*), prior to 1391, Korean merchants were traveling in groups to Liaodong to trade in animals, precious metals, and ramie cloth, despite prohibition by the Koryö state. The same passage insinuates that Korean local

officials were complicit in allowing merchants to travel across the Yalu River.⁹ Meanwhile, Zhu Yuanzhang reportedly issued an edict in 1386 permitting Koreans to travel to places such as Liaodong and Shandong for trading purposes as long as they carried official travel documents (Ch. *luyin*; Kr. *noin*).¹⁰ In 1412, the Chosŏn court required that merchants traveling to and from the northern provinces inside Korea carry similar travel documents.¹¹ In the *Laoqida*, it is stressed that the Koreans as well as their Chinese companions were traveling with proper official documents.¹²

Korea was also among a list of countries that Zhu Yuanzhang famously instructed not to invade in his *Ancestral Instructions* (*Huang Ming zuxun*).¹³ In the context of Ming diplomacy, Chosŏn Korea is often characterized as “a model Chinese tributary state,”¹⁴ and early Confucian notions such as “serving the great” (Ch. *shida*; Kr. *sadae*) and “fostering the weak” (Ch. *zixiao*; Kr. *chaso*) held special importance as the guiding principles in Ming-Chosŏn relations.¹⁵ Throughout the Ming period, the Chosŏn continued to send envoys to the Ming court or to Liaodong on tribute missions. It is estimated that the Chosŏn dispatched 391 embassies between 1392 and 1450, at an average of 6.6 embassies per year, and over 1,200 throughout the Ming period, at an average of 4.6 per year.¹⁶ Meanwhile, the Chosŏn strictly prohibited ordinary people from crossing the Yalu River to farm or engage in trade.¹⁷ The right to trade in Liaodong was essentially reserved for Chosŏn envoys, interpreters, and their escorts traveling on official tribute missions.¹⁸ While the emergence of such trade has often been examined as a consequence of the Ming attempt to strictly link foreign trade to tribute missions,¹⁹ a growing number of studies have highlighted the versatility of the so-called “tribute system” and its limitations in explaining the actual practices of foreign trade and diplomacy in the Ming-Qing period.²⁰ Scholars have also called attention to the enduring significance of rites in Ming-Chosŏn relations and to the role that the notion of propriety played in diplomacy in East Asia.²¹ Both the Ming and Chosŏn courts paid scrupulous attention to upholding diplomatic propriety. But such a concern did not preclude the merchants of the two countries from finding commercial opportunities in the border region. Despite the Chosŏn prohibition on cross-border trade, for instance, some Koreans were willing to pay handsomely to join the entourage of Chosŏn official envoys. Others were venturing to travel to Liaodong borrowing the names of official escorts.²² During the Imjin War from 1592 to 1598, when the tributary relations between the Ming and the Chosŏn took the form of a joint military campaign against the invading Japanese troops, merchants on the Ming side of the border also appear to have seen profit-making opportunities.

At the time of the Imjin War, the Wanli emperor (r. 1572–1620) committed Ming military support to restoring the Chosŏn state and stressed that his decision was driven by his moral duty to “foster the weak.”²³ As a consequence, there emerged on the ground logistical needs and challenges that had to be met by people who did not necessarily share the same moral principles. As David Robinson has suggested, frequent war mobilization by the Ming state induced a movement of people in the Ming period, if on a short-term basis.²⁴ The Ming mobilized not only soldiers, but also many others who provided logistical support, including officials and merchants. Ming and Chosŏn sources show that Chinese merchants traveled to Korea during the Imjin War, and their impact on Ming-Chosŏn relations has been analyzed by Han Myŏnggi and Piao Yan.²⁵ Building on their studies, this chapter will further explore the under-examined relationship between war, and commerce, and diplomacy in the Sino-Korean borderland of the late Ming period.²⁶ By surveying the wartime presence of Chinese merchants in Liaodong and Korea during various stages of the Imjin War, this chapter seeks to show that, while Ming participation in this transnational war was by no means ordinary, the mobilization of resources for the Ming campaign in Korea reveals the long-standing tension between the state and commerce in the Sino-Korean borderland of the late Ming period.

CHINESE MERCHANTS IN THE MING FRONTIERS

One autumn day in the tenth lunar month of 1592, the news reached King Sŏnjo’s (r. 1567–1608) court-in-exile in Ŭiju that Ming China’s recently appointed Military Commissioner Song Yingchang (1536–1606) had already departed from Beijing for Liaodong, commanding 20,000 troops to provide much-awaited military support against the invading Japanese. After landing on the Korean peninsula in the early summer of 1592, the Japanese armies quickly expanded their control over a vast territory of Korea, except for southern Chŏlla and northern P’yŏngan Provinces.²⁷ King Sŏnjo and his advisors were becoming desperately anxious to see the arrival of Ming armies in Korea. However, Song generally hesitated to share information on his armies’ movement with the Koreans. At the time, Chosŏn Minister of Works Han Ŭng’in (1554–1614) estimated that the Ming armies would likely arrive in Liaodong by the end of the tenth month. It meant that the Ming troops would reach Liaodong within twenty-four days after their departure from Beijing, which would have been a reasonable estimate considering the travel time usually required to cover the distance

between Beijing and Liaodong.²⁸ As regards the exact timing of their arrival in Korea, however, Han Üng'in did not offer any estimates, and Chosŏn officials could only speculate about when the Ming troops would cross the Yalu River and how many troops Song would bring in aid of their battered country.

Meanwhile, Song Yingchang, for his part, quickly began making preparations for the cross-border military campaign of enormous proportions.²⁹ A senior civil official from Zhejiang Province, Song was appointed to supervise the Ming campaign in Korea, reflecting civil officials' expanding military roles in the late Ming period.³⁰ Together with the arrival of additional troops, he reported that he had 38,537 soldiers under his command as of early 1593, while adding that those who were combat-ready did not exceed 20,000 due to some soldiers' poor physical condition.³¹ In addition to directing his attention towards military confrontation with the Japanese, he also took measures to secure logistical support for his soldiers on the cross-border campaign, especially during the frigid winter months. The key to providing for Ming troops in the frontiers had long been groups of Chinese merchants who delivered grain and supplies to military garrisons in return for commercial opportunities and profits. No less important than weaponry or battlefield tactics, their support and cooperation also carried considerable significance for the waging of the Ming campaign against the Japanese. Such recognition was likely shared among Ming officials in civil and military administration, and Song's letters addressed to them hint at the indispensable role merchants played in the Ming effort to procure and deliver provisions for the armies crossing the Yalu River.

We know from a proclamation issued by Song in the winter of 1592 that the Ming armies invited people not only to provide military provisions in Liaodong, but also to accompany the Ming troops into Korea and reliably supply provisions:

Imperially appointed Military Commissioner of the Ministry of War [Song Yingchang] announces the following: This Ministry has deployed a large number of troops, and they are entering Korea in the east to exterminate the Japanese rebels. If among the people of each locality are those willing to accompany the armies to where they are being stationed and sell wine and food, have them report to the local authorities and then send reports to the Ministry in order that permits (*zhizhao*) can be issued. Have them accompany the armies and conduct trade at fair prices.³²

Interestingly, this proclamation does not use the word "merchants." As we will see below, this may reflect the nature of commerce in the Sino-Korean borderland of the late Ming period, where distinctions between merchants, soldiers, and commoners could be blurred. This proclamation, which was likely issued to Ming officials in Liaodong,

also stipulated that commercial transactions must be on fair terms. Before closing the proclamation, Song warned: “Do not let the soldiers take goods by force or make purchases through deception.”³³

To the ears of Ming local officials, the proclamation’s reference to conducting trade at fair prices (*liangping jiaoyi*) must have sounded instantly familiar. They could probably recall the Ming sub-statute which recorded the Chenghua emperor’s (r. 1464–87) decree of 1478, re-establishing regular horse markets outside the city walls of Kaiyuan and Guangning in Liaodong. Trade with the Uriyangkhad Mongols had been suspended for nearly three decades, for the Ming suspected that the Uriyangkhad Mongols had colluded with the Oirats at the time of the Tumu Incident of 1449.³⁴ The 1478 decree permitted the Haixi Jurchen tribes and the Uriyangkhad Mongols to conduct trade with Chinese merchants on fair terms. It was a term often employed during the Ming to describe the prescribed nature of trade.³⁵ But the Chenghua emperor and his officials must have been well aware that such guidelines alone could not guarantee the fairness of trade conducted in the horse markets in the dynasty’s northeastern frontier. Thus, the decree goes on to state as follows:

Interpreters and merchants are prohibited from bullying or deceiving the barbarians to lower the prices of horses and steal goods. It is also forbidden to provoke the barbarians and collude to defraud them of money and goods by falsely accusing them of stealing. Should anyone dare to let the barbarians within the city walls, connive with soldiers and others who have no goods at letting them enter the market as they please, let those who have goods stay overnight inside, or divulge information regarding the frontiers for petty profits, investigate the matter thoroughly. They shall all be sentenced to banishment and military service in the swampy land of Liangguang (Guangdong and Guangxi). Even if a general amnesty is offered, they shall not be granted pardon.³⁶

This decree indicates that the Ming court remained highly cautious about individual behavior at the horse markets in Liaodong, even if the court’s senior ministers agreed that establishing official markets would serve the Ming political and commercial interests. Private trade at the horse market was also permitted or reluctantly accepted by the Ming, and establishing official horse markets can be viewed as an attempt to maintain some controls over commercial activities in Liaodong.³⁷ Despite its forceful language, the Chenghua emperor’s decree rather displays the expanding role of commerce in Liaodong and the challenge of regulating the movement, behavior, and desire of merchants, interpreters, and soldiers.³⁸

Since the early years of the dynasty, a sizable number of troops had been stationed in the northern frontiers, and the long-term presence of

troops in the north demanded careful logistical planning. According to the *Record of Government Income and Expenditure of the Wanli Reign* (*Wanli kuaiji lu*), which was presented to the Wanli emperor in 1582, the Liaodong Defense Area had supported—at least on paper—83,324 troops and 41,830 horses and mules, and there existed a reserve of 711,391 taels (approx. 27 tons) of silver and 279,212 bushels (approx. 250,000 barrels) of grain.³⁹ The provisions required to sustain border defenses in the Ming northern frontiers were in part procured through the *kaizhong* barter system.⁴⁰ During the Ming period, merchants transported grain to the northern frontiers—mostly from the northern provinces after the Yongle reign—and, in return, received salt vouchers called *yin*.⁴¹ Salt vouchers were in essence officially sanctioned salt monopoly rights that merchants could later exchange for salt in designated salt production sites.⁴² It remains unclear, however, whether the Ming government had installed such a barter mechanism during ongoing military campaigns, including the war against the Japanese in Korea. Judging from Song Yingchang's dispatches and memorials, the Ming armies do not seem to have offered any special incentives to convince merchants to accompany the Ming armies to Korea, except for the implicit prospect of reaping profits through trade.

Regardless of whether Song Yingchang had promised any enticements, it is interesting to note that he claimed that few Chinese merchants responded to his calls to accompany the Ming armies to Korea. For instance, in his letter to Minister of War Shi Xing (1538–99) in late spring of 1593, Song voiced the following concerns:

Our soldiers have long been in ice and snow. In Korea, our language is not understood, and people would not engage in trade. None of our country's merchants has answered our repeated calls because they are all afraid of war and the distance is far. As a consequence, ever since our soldiers crossed the Yalu River, they have not tasted even a single piece of vegetable or meat, let alone salt or soy sauce. In place for wine, I have distributed cows, salt, and silver and grandly rewarded the soldiers. However, that we are unable to do so constantly is truly difficult to bear. If we do not generously confer promotions and rewards, how could we lift our soldiers' morale? This is why I beg you earnestly . . . The people of Korea only use grain and cloth and do not use silver. To our delight, you have attained the imperial approval to confer silver on the soldiers. I request that we draw out ten to twenty thousand taels and acquire over 100,000 bolts of blue, red, and indigo cloth in the capital and that we hire carters to deliver rewards and facilitate the use of [the rewards]. This will be profoundly welcomed by the officers and soldiers alike.⁴³

In this letter addressed to Shi Xing, delivered as the Japanese armies began retreating from Korea's northern provinces down to Hansŏng, today's Seoul, Song Yingchang employed dramatic language and highlighted the dreadful hardships being endured by his soldiers in Korea. He also stressed that his soldiers could neither communicate with

the Koreans nor use the silver currency. Added to the difficulties was the absence of Chinese merchants who, according to Song, declined his repeated requests to come to Korea and aid the Ming war effort against the Japanese.

Despite Song Yingchang's claims that Chinese merchants did not respond to his requests to accompany the Ming troops to Korea, several of his own dispatches clearly indicate that groups of Chinese merchants did in fact travel to Korea during the Ming cross-border campaign. For example, in his dispatch in the early summer of 1593, Song gave instructions to Tong Yangzheng, a military man from Liaodong, concerning the unregulated movement of Ming soldiers across the Yalu River. Song expressed grave frustration that some among the Ming troops, including private retainers (*jiading*) of commanders, were deserting or traveling back and forth across the Yalu River without permission. He ordered Tong to send men to the Yalu River to impose stricter controls.⁴⁴ While it remains unclear whether Ming or Chosŏn guards had been stationed along the Yalu River prior to this order, Song clearly felt the need to regulate border crossings more tightly as the war continued in Korea. But, to his order to Tong, Song carefully added an exception that new restrictions should not apply to traveling merchants from China:

As regards the merchants who come to Korea in order to conduct trade, carry out thorough checks but let them go. Do not completely block them. Among the officials guarding the [Yalu] River, should anyone search merchants for valuables and cause trouble, this Ministry will probe the truth and, in accordance with military law, make certain that they are bound and beaten a hundred times and investigate wrongdoing. Immediately post the matter addressed in this order and let it be known. Report back on the situation.⁴⁵

Thus, while Song Yingchang highlighted the difficulty of persuading Chinese merchants to accompany the armies in his letter to Shi Xing, he was taking precautionary measures to ensure that merchants could in fact travel to Korea without being hampered or harassed by guards along the Sino-Korean border. Ming officials in charge of provisions in Korea were at the time facing serious challenges in Korea because of linguistic, monetary, and cultural differences between China and Korea. If those officials were able to enlist the services of Chinese merchants in Korea by promising profits, they could delegate a portion of the logistical burden to merchants. Perhaps such calculation could explain why Song Yingchang chose to single out merchants in his dispatch to Tong Yangzheng and sought to ensure that they could travel across the Yalu River during the war. Considering that there existed fairly large Korean communities in Liaodong, merchants in Liaodong may have

included those of Korean descent or those who could communicate in Korean. Admittedly, Song's directive merely guaranteed safe and unhindered passage of Chinese merchants into Korea and does not directly speak to their arrival in Korea. But Song likely knew that Chinese merchants were indeed traveling from Liaodong to Korea. Such is the situation vividly illustrated by Korean historical records, including the *Annals of King Sŏnjo*.

CONDUCTING TRADE IN WARTIME KOREA

For the Ming armies, even after the successful recapture of P'yŏngyang in early 1593, the need for merchants in procuring provisions remained essentially unchanged. Viewed from the perspective of Korea's Chosŏn court, severe food shortage caused by the destructive war against the Japanese created a pressing need for procuring food and other supplies from outside the country. As naval battles with the Japanese raged off the coast of the southern provinces of the Chosŏn, Chinese merchants appear to have at least partially fulfilled the Chosŏn logistical needs. One entry in the *Annals of King Sŏnjo* from the summer of 1593 suggests that over 4,000 civilians from China, including merchants and families of Ming soldiers, were staying in the city of P'yŏngyang. The same entry indicates that they were carrying official travel documents but were not easily distinguishable from soldiers. Thus, King Sŏnjo had to ask if they were all soldiers or merchants.⁴⁶ Out of dire need for food and goods from China, and perhaps out of desire to draw much-needed revenue through taxes, the Chosŏn court soon decided to establish a periodic market on a sand bar of the Yalu River in cooperation with the Ming administration in Liaodong. Known as the Chunggang market, this officially sanctioned venue for trade with Chinese merchants started by the spring of 1594 and enabled the Chosŏn to obtain essential supplies as the war against the Japanese continued.⁴⁷ It is unclear how frequently Korean and Chinese officials held the Chunggang market during the initial phase of the market's existence. But an entry in the *Annals of Sŏnjo* from 1597 informs us that the market was then taking place on the third, sixth, and ninth days of each ten-day period, a total of nine market days each month.⁴⁸

Among King Sŏnjo's senior advisors, one of the most vocal proponents of the Chunggang market was Yu Sŏngnyong (1542–1607), who was leading the Chosŏn defense effort as a senior minister in the Chosŏn government. Citing widespread famine in wartime Chosŏn society as the primary reason for establishing an officially administered market in the Yalu River, Yu later explained the opening of the

Chunggang market in the following manner:

We opened a market on the Chunggang sand bar of the Yalu River. At the time, famine was becoming increasingly severe day by day, and the bodies of those who died of starvation filled the fields. Public and private reserves had been depleted, and we could take no relief measures. I requested that we send a communication to Liaodong and ask to open a market at Chunggang in order to conduct trade. [Officials of] China also knew that our country's famine was severe. They memorialized the throne and had our request approved. Thereupon, Liaodong's grain began to enter our country in large quantities. The people of P'yŏngan Province were the first to benefit [from the market]. The people of the capital also participated by sea routes. In the course of several years, countless people supported their livelihood by relying upon the market. At the time, a bolt of cotton cloth was worth less than a peck of unhusked grain in our country. At Chunggang, however, it was worth over twenty pecks of husked grain. Those who used silver, copper, and cast iron (*such'ŏl*), in particular, could increase their profits tenfold. I understood for the first time that it is indeed sensible that the ancients considered commerce to be the essence of famine relief.⁴⁹

In his recollection of the event, a bolt of cotton cloth was at the time priced over twenty times more at the Chunggang market than in Korea. Depending on one's perspective, this could have meant that Korea's cotton cloth was in great demand among Chinese merchants, or that there was an abundant supply of grain in Liaodong, putting deflationary pressure on the grain prices at the Chunggang market. With the absence of further evidence, we need to assess such descriptions of commodity prices at the Chunggang market with due caution. To Yu's eyes, however, there clearly existed a noticeable difference in grain prices between the Chunggang market and the other parts of Korea, and one could procure grain cheaply. In addition, those who traded at the Chunggang market appear to have highly valued silver, copper, and cast iron. As we will see below, Chinese merchants were at the time purchasing cast iron items in Korea quite aggressively. While reasons for their strong interest in metals remain unclear, Yu Sŏngnyong also noted, likely in early 1594, that people from China were eagerly seeking cast iron.⁵⁰

For the Chosŏn, famine relief was evidently among the primary objectives of establishing the Chunggang market. The market offered a venue for buying grain, soybeans, and cotton from Liaodong.⁵¹ The Chosŏn also appears to have levied taxes.⁵² In addition, Chosŏn officials discussed purchasing animals from Liaodong. In the early summer of 1594, for example, the senior ministers of the Border Defense Command (Pibyŏnsa), including Yu Sŏngnyong, submitted the following memorial to King Sŏnjo:

Domestic animals are proliferating in China. Oxen are used to farm the land, while

horses are used in the battlefield. For carrying and transporting loads, and for riding, they all use donkeys and mules. When mules are put to work, they are twice as well-behaved and strong as horses. They can carry heavy loads and travel far. They can endure thirst and are easy to raise. They are indeed the strongest of all the domestic animals. Our country only has oxen and horses. Donkeys and mules are extremely few. Thus, for mounts used by local governments and for riding and loading at post stations, we all use oxen and horses. We propose that of the grasslands in P'yŏngan Province, we should select areas where water and grass are abundant and gather a few hundred horse mares. We should purchase male donkeys⁵³ in Liaodong and have them mix and pasture there. Someone with thorough knowledge of the nature of equines should be appointed as Horse Pasturage Supervisor (Kammokkwan) and be required to produce a result. Then, within a few years, newborns will all be mules. Furthermore, if we take advantage of the current trading opportunity at the Chunggang market in Ŭiju and purchase donkeys in large numbers, this shall be implemented with ease.⁵⁴

Evident in this memorial, in accordance with which King Sŏnjo instructed his ministers to take action, is the seminal role that senior Chosŏn officials assigned to the Chunggang market and, more generally, to commerce during wartime. As Yu Sŏngnyong stressed in his writing, the Chunggang market indeed began under testing circumstances as the Japanese invasion deprived the Chosŏn court of material and financial resources. But the market's role was not limited to procuring food for famine relief. By obtaining male donkeys and breeding mules in P'yŏngan Province at the Chunggang market, Chosŏn officials sought to reallocate animal labor and to implement change in transport and farming over a span of at least a few years.

Meanwhile, the Japanese invasion of Korea presented a unique opportunity for Chinese merchants to travel to Korea alongside the Ming armies, and they appear to have penetrated deep into the Korean peninsula. While only fragmented evidence remains concerning merchant activities in wartime Chosŏn society, a few remaining sources offer a glimpse of Chinese merchants who arrived in Korea over the course of the seven-year war against the Japanese. According to the *Annals of King Sŏnjo*, one Ming official who had particularly close ties to merchants was Commissioner Yang Hao (d. 1629). Yang took charge of the Ming campaign in Korea towards the war's end and arrived in Korea in the late summer of 1597. He was a native of Henan Province and a *jinshi* degree holder of the class of 1580. As the imperially appointed civil official to administer the military affairs in Korea, he directed the Ming military operations in Korea until the summer of 1598, when he was impeached by the Ming court following his failure to capture the Japanese-held city of Ulsan on the southeastern coast of Kyŏngsang Province the previous winter.⁵⁵ In the early summer of 1599, after the withdrawal of the Japanese armies from the Korean peninsula, the senior ministers of the Border Defense Command made the

following report, attributing the arrival of a large number of Chinese merchants to Yang Hao:

Commissioner Yang [Hao] in the beginning believed that the celestial (i.e. Ming) troops were traveling a far distance and enduring the hardship of staying on a battered land with no human soul. As regards daily supplies such as food and clothing, he considered it pitiful that even if they received monthly payments in silver, there was no place to spend them right away. [Thus,] he permitted merchants to receive travel documents (Ch. *luyin*; Kr. *noin*) from the administration office in Liaodong⁵⁶ and, after having them verified at the office of the Commissioner, to travel to where the soldiers were being stationed and conduct trade. It truly benefited both sides. [However,] now that they have tasted success by being able to sell goods at high prices, merchants are coming in groups. Some even dare to pretend to be government soldiers and commit fraud along the way. Its harm is widespread, and it is difficult to root out the practice.⁵⁷

This memorial describes the process through which Chinese merchants received government documents to travel to Korea, and it bears a striking resemblance to the procedure that Song Yingchang stipulated in his dispatch from the winter of 1592. It is also interesting to note that, just as over 4,000 civilians in P'yŏngyang could be mistaken for Ming soldiers in the summer of 1593, this memorial suggests that merchants were able to disguise themselves as Ming soldiers if they so wished. By the same token, this may suggest that Ming soldiers could also pass unnoticed if they took on the appearance of merchants. While travel documents may have provided Ming and Chosŏn officials with a semblance of control over the movement of Chinese merchants across the Yalu River, such control appears to have been rather elusive when it came to determining who they were and where they were headed.

CHINESE MERCHANTS IN THE WAKE OF WAR

In the aftermath of the Japanese withdrawal from Korea at the end of 1598, roughly 15,000 Ming troops remained in Korea to deter another surprise attack by the Japanese. Many of the Chinese merchants who had come to Korea during the war also opted to stay in Korea, or lacked the means to return home. However, their continued presence in Korea was apparently causing irritation in some regions. For example, consider the grievances of Koreans recorded in the same report from the early summer of 1599, examined in the previous section. Having emphasized Yang Hao's role in bringing Chinese merchants to Korea towards the end of the war, the ministers of the Border Defense Command went on to describe the growing tension between Chinese merchants and communities in western provinces of the Chosŏn in the following manner:

Recently, it has come to our attention that [Chinese] merchants have scattered into coastal regions, including Hwanghae, Kyōnggi, and Ch'ungch'ōng Provinces and are plundering cast iron items from people's homes. Items such as farming tools and cauldrons have all been forcibly taken. They are collected and loaded on to vessels. The people of coastal regions are crying out with resentment.⁵⁸

As Yu Sōngnyong noted in recounting the beginnings of the Chunggang market, cast iron items were priced highly at the Chunggang market. But Chinese merchants' desire to acquire them did not stop there and appears to have extended far beyond the Sino-Korean border. According to an entry in the *Annals of King Sōnjo* from the fall of 1599, the Chinese were acquiring cast iron items in Korea because the price of iron had soared in the Yangzi delta region in China.⁵⁹ If merchants were indeed traveling between China's east coast and Korea, it is likely that news and rumors followed such movement of merchants and goods. In early 1599, the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci observed in Nanjing that people in the city were overjoyed at the news that the war in Korea had just ended.⁶⁰ Perhaps, such news was arriving on the Yangzi delta together with loads of goods shipped from Korea, including cast iron items.

In the subsequent years, proposals were submitted to King Sōnjo, requesting that the Chosōn should take stricter measures to keep Korean merchants from trading with Chinese merchants at the Chunggang market to prevent conflict and diplomatic ignominy.⁶¹ By the early summer of 1600, King Sōnjo had decided to terminate the Chunggang market by issuing the following order, written in the self-depreciatory but resolute language characteristic of the Chosōn court's handling of its relations with the Ming at the time:

China and our little country have clear borders. After the war began, we opened a market at Chunggang. Although it started as a temporary measure, I have constantly held reservations. Now that trouble has been caused, on this occasion, the market shall be abolished and strictly prohibited in accordance with the precedents of ordinary times.⁶²

In this order, while King Sōnjo stressed the existence of trouble as the primary reason for terminating the Chunggang market, he did not name any specific incidents that had alerted him. But in his formal request to end the Chunggang market sent to Ming officials in Liaodong, he specifically cited the case of a Korean interpreter named Ku Nam and two unnamed merchants from Hansōng who were forcibly detained by Ming reconnaissance soldiers (*yebushou*) because of a money-related dispute with a certain Chinese merchant named Li Jiru.⁶³ In this instance, Li Jiru first took his complaint to Liaodong's General Administration Circuit (*Fenshou dao*), a civilian office, which in turn

had the military outpost of Zhenjiang near the Yalu River dispatch men to detain the three Korean men. The involvement of both Ming civil and military institutions in Liaodong in response to a commercial dispute shows the tangled nature of civil and military administration in Liaodong and is suggestive of the prevailing influence of Ming authority over the region's commerce. The Korean interpreter Ku Nam was later captured by the Chosŏn and sentenced to beheading for the charges of defrauding Chinese merchants, attempting to escape arrest, and forging official seals.⁶⁴

For the Chosŏn court, while the Chunggang market initially provided opportunities to fulfill both short-term and medium-term needs during the Imjin War, unregulated commercial activities outside the Chunggang market eventually came to present a major nuisance. For instance, Chinese farmers who had settled on the Ming side of the Yalu River were reportedly crossing the river in the dead of the night by small boat, likely in an attempt to evade paying taxes, to trade in goods such as yellow ginseng. Especially in the fall, when ginseng harvest was at its peak, such nighttime boat traffic was difficult to stop.⁶⁵ In deference to the Wanli emperor, who had sent armies to Korea to support the Chosŏn against the Japanese, King Sŏnjo wished to avoid offending the Ming and was perturbed by the possibility that minor incidents at the Chunggang market could escalate into serious disputes between the two countries. He remarked that trade with Chinese merchants could continue in Hansŏng but that the Chunggang market needed to be closed. He appears to have reasoned that banning all trade at the Chunggang market would help him take out the root of the problem.⁶⁶

Despite King Sŏnjo's intention to close the Chunggang market, some of his officials sounded a cautionary note on hastily closing the market. Min Chungnam (1540–1605), for example, memorialized in the early summer of 1600 and expressed his views as follows:

Although the Chunggang market was established at our own request, it has taken place for many years, and the people of both countries have equally benefited from the market. During this time, however, we have not been free of evil-doers who have caused disturbance, and it is appropriate to send a communication and request that the market shall be terminated. But the celestial soldiers have not withdrawn, and Chinese merchants are now everywhere inside and outside the capital. If we request that only the Chunggang market shall be terminated, this matter will be disquieting. I hereby propose that we monitor the situation for the time being and take measures after deliberating further.⁶⁷

While acknowledging that the Chunggang market had its own problems, Min suggested that since Chinese merchants were already in many parts of the country, closing the market alone would not offer a solution.

P'yŏngan Governor Sŏ Sŏng (1558–1631) also argued that if the Chosŏn suddenly closed the Chunggang market, it would not only anger merchants, but also gravely irritate Ming border guards and military officials at the outpost of Zhenjiang by the Yalu River, leading them to accuse the Chosŏn of “forgetting the great mercy of giving life to the dead and flesh to the bones” bestowed by the Ming.⁶⁸ This suggests that Ming border guards and military officials both had a stake in keeping the Chunggang market open. They were perhaps engaging in trade themselves or receiving some payments from merchants.

On the part of the Ming, another practical concern was likely that they would lose the tax revenue derived from the Chunggang market. A communication from the General Administration Circuit of Liaodong in the winter of 1606 indicates that the Chunggang market generated an annual tax revenue of 1,554 taels and 2 maces (approx. 58 kg) in silver, which accounted for over a tenth of the Circuit's commercial tax revenue of 14,300 taels (approx. 533 kg).⁶⁹ Some Ming officials even suspected that King Sŏnjo's true intention was to evade Ming taxes and instead to concentrate on tribute trade, which was tax-free.⁷⁰ Such suspicion likely fueled strong Ming objections to the closure of the Chunggang market. The Chosŏn request to close the market was once approved in 1601 by the Grand Coordinator (*Xunfu*) of Liaodong.⁷¹ Within a year, however, the Ming eunuch Gao Huai, who was dispatched to Liaodong by the Wanli emperor to supervise the collection of the mine tax, sent a strongly worded request to reopen the market, and the Chosŏn acquiesced.⁷² Gao also demanded that the Chosŏn open silver mines, allow the use of silver at the Chunggang market, and have Korean merchants bring ginseng to the Chunggang market.⁷³ While King Sŏnjo remained reluctant to comply with Gao's requests, the Chunggang market formally continued at least until 1613.⁷⁴

During and after the Imjin War from 1592 to 1598, Chinese merchants left behind a sense of great unease among Chosŏn officials. But few voices of Chinese merchants themselves are documented in Chinese and Korean sources. One notable exception is a petition by Chinese merchants recorded in the *Annals of King Sŏnjo*. In the early spring of 1601, the ministers of the Border Defense Command reported to the King that after the Chosŏn had ordered the Chinese merchants to leave, over fifty merchants came together to submit the following petition:

Initially, we came this far despite considerable hardships because of the order to provide assistance by trading before the armies. But we have now been ordered to return home immediately. It has not been long since we arrived, and we have not sold our goods. The situation is extremely urgent and disheartening. We request that the deadline be extended out of mercy so that we do not have to lose our

In light of this plea for help made by Chinese merchants, the Border Defense Command proposed the following measure to King Sŏnjo:

These people have official documents issued by the Ming. In addition, when they came, they transported goods from Liaoyang by hiring donkeys. When they arrived, they immediately sent back the donkeys in accordance with customary practice. Now, if we force them to leave before they can sell [their goods], a large volume of goods will be left behind. Not only will the situation be disquieting, but their discontent could result in the malady of inviting unfavorable words behind our back. As a temporary measure, we propose that we allow them to stay until a predetermined date and sell their goods quickly before returning home. There appears to be no harm in implementing this measure.⁷⁶

For those Chinese who traveled to Korea during the war against the Japanese, whether they were responding to the Ming calls to accompany the troops, or simply pursuing their personal profits, the journey itself must have involved substantial personal risks. The *Annals of King Sŏnjo* does not document in detail how King Sŏnjo reacted to the predicament and concerns of Chinese merchants. This particular entry simply closes with the customary sign of approval by the King: “Approved.” Perhaps such a rather muted response from King Sŏnjo poignantly embodied the difficulty of imposing controls on the cross-border movement of people and goods across the Yalu River.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has briefly sketched the manner in which the war mobilization for the Ming campaign in Korea in the final decade of the sixteenth century drew upon the existing networks of merchants in the Sino-Korean borderland. Korea was a space which was connected not only to Liaodong via overland routes. Weather permitting, it was also linked to the Shandong peninsula and the Yangtze delta region by sea.⁷⁷ Chinese merchants, for their part, probably saw the commercial benefit of accompanying the Ming armies to Korea. Despite the risks that war inevitably presented, merchants crossed the Yalu River, armed with travel permits issued by Ming officials in Liaodong. Some hired donkeys in Liaoyang to transport their goods to Korea. But the arrangement was such that they had to send the animals back to Liaoyang once they had reached their destination. The returning donkeys were possibly accompanied by another group of merchants traveling to Liaodong, producing a continual traffic of people, goods, and animals between Liaodong and Korea during the war. It remains unclear how many merchants traveled from Liaodong to Korea during the Imjin War. As

suggested by King Sŏnjo's confusion concerning the identity of over 4,000 Chinese civilians in P'yŏngyang, the number could have been in the thousands or more. If Chosŏn officials experienced difficulty in distinguishing merchants from soldiers, it was in part because merchants were not an exclusive group. Ming soldiers as well as their relatives who followed them to Korea could have engaged in trade with Koreans. Occupational categories such as merchants and soldiers appear to have been shifting constantly in the Sino-Korean borderland during the Imjin War. Such fluidity made it possible for some to don the identity of a soldier when they saw opportunities to maximize their personal gains.

It is important to keep in mind that Ming and Chosŏn officials assessed and described such wartime movement of people, goods, and animals in the language of tributary relations. King Sŏnjo also expressed his concerns over the continuation of the Chunggang market as, in his view, it was threatening to undermine his sense of propriety towards the Wanli emperor and the Ming. As an analytical framework, however, tributary relations between the Ming and the Chosŏn leave an undefined space for interactions at the social and individual levels and fall short of fully explaining the manner in which Chinese merchants arrived in Korea and conducted trade during and after the Imjin War. The late Ming period saw an increased coordination of civil and military authorities. It was also when the public and private spheres of activities became increasingly intertwined. The Sino-Korean borderland of the late Ming was perhaps one of such spaces, where the interrelationship between diplomacy, war, and commerce became crucial and also came under duress. Merchants and existing commercial networks in the Sino-Korean borderland logistically enabled the Ming to fight a cross-border war against the Japanese. The vast destruction across Korea rendered by the Japanese troops also demonstrated the critical importance of Korea's geographical link to the Liaodong peninsula. In the final passage of the *Laoqida*, the Korean protagonist bids a heartfelt farewell to his Chinese travel companion from Liaoyang as he heads home to Korea: "Now we are parting. Don't say that we shall not meet again in the future. Even for mountains there is a time when they shall meet. When we meet again in the future, what else could we be [to each other] but good friends?"⁷⁸ We can only imagine if Chinese merchants were exchanging similar words of courtesy and friendship with their Korean counterparts as they returned home after the war against the Japanese had ended.⁷⁹ Even in the absence of words, however, their very presence in Korea during the war likely rendered it evident that Chosŏn society did not exist in isolation in the commerce and diplomacy of the late Ming world.

NOTES

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- 1 *Nogŏltae* (Old China hand), in *Nogŏltae, Nogŏltae ŏnhae* (Seoul: Seoul taehakkyo Kyujanggak, 2003), 6. The translation is based on Svetlana Rimsky-Korsakoff Dyer, *Grammatical Analysis of the Lao Ch'i-Ta: With an English Translation of the Chinese Text* (Canberra: Faculty of Asian Studies, Australian National University, 1983), 311. Translation modified.
- 2 For the extant editions and copies of *Laoqida*, see Yi T'aesu, *Laoqida si zhong banben yuyan yanjiu* (Beijing: Yuwen chubanshe, 2003), 6–11; Chŏng Sŭnghye, “Yŏngnamdae sojang *Nogŏltae* (Kogwi727) ŭi charyojŏng t'ŭksŏng e taehayŏ,” *Minjok munhwa nonch'ong* 51 (2012), 163–70.
- 3 Piao Yan, *Mindai Chū-Chō henkyō no kenkyū* (Ph.D. diss., Kyoto University, 2010), 114–18.
- 4 Piao, *Mindai Chū-Chō henkyō no kenkyū*, 11–26.
- 5 *Sejo sillok* (Annals of King Sejo), fasc. 34, Sejo10/8/1 (9/2/1464), in *Chosŏn wangjo sillok* (1955–59; rpt., Seoul: Kuksa p'yŏnch'an wiwŏnhoe, 1968–71), 7:640; Kawachi Yoshihiro, “Mindai Ryōyō no Tōneiei ni tsuite,” *Tōyōshi kenkyū* 44.4 (1986), 692–7.
- 6 *Sŏngjong sillok* (Annals of King Sŏngjong), fasc. 161, Sŏngjong14/12/12 (1/10/1484), in *Chosŏn wangjo sillok*, 10:550.
- 7 *Sŏngjong sillok*, fasc. 219, Sŏngjong19/8/24 (9/29/1488), 11:369. Ch'oe Pu (1454–1504), who was shipwrecked off the coast of Cheju Island and eventually returned overland to Korea via Liaodong in 1488, also recorded that the people inhabiting the area between Liaoyang and the Yalu River were all emigrants from Korea and that they were speaking Korean. See Ch'oe Pu, *Kŭmmam chip*, fasc. 5, in *Yŏngin p'yoyŏm Han'guk munjip ch'onggan* (Seoul: Kyŏngin munhwasa, 1988), 16:502.
- 8 Timothy Brook, “Communications and Commerce,” in Denis Twitchett and Frederick W. Mote, eds., *Cambridge History of China*, vol. 8, *The Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644, Part 2* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 581. Interestingly, commercial travel routes to Korea seem absent in extant Ming-Qing merchant manuals and route books. For discussion of Ming-Qing merchant manuals, see Chen Xuewen, *Ming-Qing shiqi shangyeshu ji shangrenshu zhi yanjiu* (Taipei: Hongye wenhua, 1997); Timothy Brook, *Geographical Sources of Ming-Qing History*, 2nd ed. (Ann Arbor, MI: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 2002).
- 9 *Koryŏsa* (History of the Koryŏ), fasc. 46, Kongyangwang 3/5/13 (6/25/1391) (Tokyo: Kokusho kankōkai, 1908–1909), 1:686; Chŏng Kwang, Satō Haruhiko, and Kin Bunkyō, “Kaisetsu” (Explanatory notes) in *Rōkitsudai: Chōsen chūsei no Chūgokugo kaiwa dokuhon*, trans. and anno. Kin Bunkyō, Gen Yukiko, and Satō Haruhiko (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 2002), 352.
- 10 *Koryŏsa*, fasc. 136, 3:737.
- 11 *T'aejong sillok* (Annals of King T'aejong), fasc. 23, T'aejong12/4/3 (5/13/1412), in *Chosŏn wangjo sillok*, 1:630. In the *Kyŏngguk taejŏn*, which was completed in

- 1485, *noin* is also explained as a document issued to soldiers returning home. See *Kyōngguk taejōn* (Tokyo: Gakushūin Tōyō bunka kenkyūjo, 1971), 464.
- 12 Dyer, *Grammatical Analysis of the Lao Ch'i-Ta*, 373 and Chōng et al., *Rōkitsu dai*, 353.
- 13 John W. Dardess, *Ming China, 1368–1644: A Concise History of a Resilient Empire* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), 1–2; *Da Ming huidian*, comp. Li Dongyang et al., rev. Shen Shixing et al., fasc. 105 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chubangongsi, 1976), 3:1585.
- 14 Donald N. Clark, “Sino-Korean Tributary Relations under the Ming,” in Twitchett and Mote, *Cambridge History of China*, 8:272.
- 15 One early mention of the phrases “serving the great” and “fostering the weak” is in *Chunqiu Zuozhuan*, 16th year of Duke Zhao. James Legge, *Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, pt. 2, 664. Translation modified.
- 16 Clark, “Sino-Korean Tributary Relations,” 280; Fuma Susumu, *Chōsen enkōshi to Chōsen tsūshinshi* (Nagoya: Nagoya daigaku shuppankai, 2015), 4.
- 17 For discussion of Ming and Chosŏn prohibition on farming in eastern Liaodong and the sand bars of the Yalu River, see Zhang Cunwu, “Mingji Zhong-Han dui Yalujiang xiayou daoyu guishuquan zhi jiaoshe,” *Hanguo xuebao* 8 (1989), 8–19; Piao, *Mindai Chū-Chō henkyō no kenkyū*, 114–97.
- 18 Piao, *Mindai Chū-Chō henkyō no kenkyū*, 203. The ban on cross-border trade in early Chosŏn is found in *Taejo sillok* (Annals of King Taejo), fasc. 2, Taejo 11/12/24, 1:38. Donald Clark describes the trade conducted by Chosŏn envoys between the Yalu and Beijing as “private trade.” See Clark, “Sino-Korean Tributary Relations,” 281; Donald Clark, “The Ming Connection: Notes on Korea’s Experience in the Chinese Tributary System,” *Transactions of the Korea Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 58 (1983), 83. Also see Paek Okkyōng, “Chosŏn chōn’gi ūi sahaeng milmuyōk yōn’gu: pūgyōng sahaeng-il chungshim ūro,” *Yōksa munhwak yōn’gu* 24 (2006), 3–40; Liu Chunli, “Mingdai Chaoxian shichen yu Liaodong maoyi yanjiu,” *Baicheng shifanxueyuan xuebao* 26, no. 1 (2012), 10–13; Ku Toyōng, “16 segi Chosŏn tae-Myōng pulbōp muyōk ūi hwaktae wa kū ūiūi,” *Han’guksa yōn’gu*, 170 (2015), 177–223; Ku Toyōng, “Chosŏn chōn’gi tae-Myōng sahaeng hosonggun chedo wa unyōng,” *Inmun’gwahak*, 50 (2016), 185–207; Han Myōnggi, “Imjin waeran shigi Myōnggun chihwibu ūi Chosŏn e taehan yogu wa kansōp,” *Han’guk’ak yōn’gu* 36 (2015), 477–523.
- 19 In his influential edited volume *The Chinese World Order*, John Fairbank also stressed that the theory of the tribute system did not necessarily reflect the actual practice of foreign trade, noting: “the chief problem of China’s foreign relations was how to square theory with fact, the ideological claim with the actual practice.” John K. Fairbank, “A Preliminary Framework,” in *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China’s Foreign Relations*, ed. John K. Fairbank (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 2–3. The relationship between trade and tribute in the Yuan and the Ming is briefly discussed in Timothy Brook, *The Troubled Empire: China in the Yuan and Ming Dynasties* (Cambridge, MA, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 219–25. Also see Danjō Hiroshi, *Mindai kaikin chōkō shisutemu to kai chitsujo* (Kyoto: Kyoto daigaku gakujutsu shuppankai, 2013).
- 20 See, for example, Fuma, *Chōsen enkōshi to Chōsen tsūshinshi*, 560–61. Also see the articles in the special issue on the tribute system in the *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 77, no. 1 (2017); Nakajima Gakushō, “The Structure and Transformation of the Ming Tribute Trade System,” in *Global History and New*

Polycentric Approaches: Europe, Asia and the Americas in a World Network System, ed. Manuel Perez Garcia and Lucio De Sousa (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 137–62.

- 21 Fuma Susumu, “Min-Shin Chūgoku no tai-Chōsen gaikō ni okeru ‘rei’ to ‘monzai,’” in Fuma Susumu, ed., *Chūgoku Higashi Ajia gaikō kōryūshi no kenkyū* (Kyoto: Kyoto daigaku gakujutsu shuppankai, 2007), 311–53. Also see Piao, *Mindai Chū-Chō henkyō no kenkyū*, 1–7.
- 22 Piao, *Mindai Chū-Chō henkyō no kenkyū*, 205; Saeyoung Park, “Me, Myself, and My Hegemony: The Work of Making the Chinese World Order a Reality,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 77. 1 (2017), 54.
- 23 *Sōnjo sillok* (Annals of King Sōnjo), fasc. 30, Sōnjo25/9/2 (10/6/1592), in *Chosōn wangjo sillok*, 21:538.
- 24 David Robinson, “Why Military Institutions Matter for Ming History,” *Journal of Chinese History* 1 (2017): 312.
- 25 Han Myōnggi, *Imjin waeran kwa Han-Chung kwan’gye* (Seoul: Yōksa pip’yōngsa, 1999), 98–104; Piao, *Mindai Chū-Chō henkyō no kenkyū*, 234–56. Also see O Hosōng, *Imjin waeran kwa Cho-Myōng-Il ūi kunsu shisūt’em* (P’aju: Kyōngin munhwasa, 2017).
- 26 For a broader discussion of the interlinked nature of the Sino-Korean borderland during the Imjin War, see Masato Hasegawa, “War, Supply Lines, and Society in the Sino-Korean Borderland of the Late Sixteenth Century,” *Late Imperial China* 37. 1 (2016), 109–52. The interrelationship between military logistics and commerce in the Qing period has been examined, for example, by Ulrich Theobald, *War Finance and Logistics in Late Imperial China: A Study of the Second Jinchuan Campaign (1771–1776)* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); Yingcong Dai, “Military Finance of the High Qing Period: An Overview,” in Nicola di Cosmo, ed., *Military Culture in Imperial China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 296–316.
- 27 *Sōnjo sillok*, fasc. 31, Sōnjo25/10/4 (11/7/1592), 21:551. For analysis of the Imjin War as one of the first major international conflicts in East Asia, see Kenneth M. Swope, *A Dragon’s Head and a Serpent’s Tail: Ming China and the First Great East Asian War, 1592–1598* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009).
- 28 According to the *T’ongmun’gwan chi*, which was first compiled in the early eighteenth century, the expected duration of travel between Beijing and the Yalu River was twenty-eight days. *T’ongmun’gwan chi* (Keijō: Chōsen kosho kankōkai, 1913), 57–8.
- 29 For a comparison of army size with contemporary Europe, see Robinson, “Why Military Institutions Matter,” 317–18.
- 30 Kai Filipiak, “The Effects of Civil Officials Handling Military Affairs in Ming Times,” *Ming Studies* 66.1 (2012), 1–15. For civil-military tensions during the Imjin War, see Masato Hasegawa, “Provisions and Profits in a Wartime Borderland: Supply Lines and Society in the Border Region between China and Korea, 1592–1644,” (Ph.D. Diss., Yale University, 2013), 26–35.
- 31 Song Yingchang, *Jinglüe fuguo yaobian*, fasc. 6, Wanli21/2/16 (3/18/1593) (Taipei: Huawen shuju, 1968), 1:500–507. Meanwhile, the *Annals of King Sōnjo* records that 43,500 Ming soldiers participated in the siege of P’yōngyang in the first month of 1593. See *Sōnjo sillok*, fasc. 34, Sōnjo26/1/11 (2/11/1593), 21:602.
- 32 Song Yingchang, *Jinglüe fuguo yaobian*, fasc. 3, Wanli20/11/18 (12/21/1592), 1:245–46.
- 33 Song Yingchang, *Jinglüe fuguo yaobian*, fasc. 3, Wanli20/11/18 (12/21/1592),

- 34 For the re-establishment of horse trade with the Uriyangkhad Mongols in 1478, see Ejima Hisao, *Mindai Shinsho no Jochokushi kenkyū* (Fukuoka: Chūgoku shoten, 1999), 335–55. Also see Kim Seonmin, *Ginseng and Borderland: Territorial Boundaries and Political Relations Between Qing China and Choson Korea, 1636–1912* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 26.
- 35 Chiu Peng-sheng, “You shichan lüli yanbian kan Ming-Qing zhengfu dui shichang de falü guifan,” in Guoli Taiwan daxue lishixuexi, ed., *Shixue: Chuancheng yu bianqian xueshu yantaohui lunwenji* (Taipei: Guoli Taiwan daxue lishixuexi, 1998), 291–334. According to Abe Takeo’s study, a similar phrase of *liangping hegu* had been in official use since the late Tang period to indicate commercial transactions between the state and local residents on fair terms. See Abe Takeo, *Gendaishi no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1972), 182–91.
- 36 *Da Ming huidian*, fasc. 164, 4:2303.
- 37 Ejima Hisao, “Ryōtō bashi ni okeru shishi to iwayuru Kaigen nankan bashi,” in Hino Kaizaburō, ed., *Shigematsu sensei koki kinen Kyūshū daigaku Tōyōshi ronsō* (Fukuoka: Kyūshū daigaku bunkakubu Tōyōshi kenkyūshitsu, 1957), 19–39.
- 38 Iwai Shigeki, “16–17 seiki no Chūgoku henkyō shakai,” in Ono Kazuko, ed., *Minmatsu Shinsho no shakai to bunka* (Kyoto: Kyōto daigaku jinbun kagaku kenkyūjo, 1996), 625–59; Evelyn S. Rawski, *Early Modern China and Northeast Asia: Cross-Border Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 77–83.
- 39 Lai Jiancheng, *Bianzhen liangxiang: Mingdai zhonghouqi de bianfang jingfei yu guojia caizheng weiji, 1531–1602* (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan, Lianjing chubanshe, 2008), 56.
- 40 Terada Takanobu, *Sansei shōnin no kenkyū: Mindai ni okeru shōnin oyobi shōgyōshihon* (Kyoto: Kyōto daigaku bungakubu nai Tōyōshi kenkyūkai, 1972), 15–119; Ray Huang, *Taxation and Governmental Finance in Ming China* (1974; repr., London: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 189–224. *Kaizhong* originally meant to announce the rate of exchange between grain and salt-purchasing permits on a wooden placard. Wada Sei, ed., *Minshi shokkashi yakuchū*, 2nd ed. (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 1996), 458–9.
- 41 For discussion of originating places of grain sent to the northern frontiers, see Terada Takanobu, “Min’unryō to tondenryō: Mindai ni okeru henshō no ichi sokumen (2)” *Tōyōshi kenkyū* 21.2 (1962), 197–9.
- 42 During the late Ming period, such salt production sites numbered nearly one hundred and sixty. Terada, *Sansei shōnin no kenkyū*, 96–7. For the function of the salt certificate as public debt, see Wing-kin Puk, *The Rise and Fall of a Public Debt Market in 16th-Century China: The Story of the Ming Salt Certificate* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).
- 43 Song Yingchang, *Jinglüe fuguo yaobian*, fasc. 7, Wanli21/3/2 (4/3/1593), 1:546–50.
- 44 Song Yingchang, *Jinglüe fuguo yaobian*, fasc. 8, Wanli21/4/15 (5/15/1593), 2:651–52. For discussion of the issue of desertion during the Imjin War, see Zhao Jing, “Renchen zhanzheng shiqi Chaoxian bandao Ming taojun wenti yanjiu” (Master’s thesis, Jinan University, 2015). Also see E. John Gregory, “Desertion and the Militarization of Qing Legal Culture” (Ph.D. Diss., Georgetown University, 2015), 437–56; Zhang Nuo, “Mingdai taojun wenti yanjiu” (Master’s thesis, Qinghai shifan daxue, 2009).
- 45 Song Yingchang, *Jinglüe fuguo yaobian*, fasc. 8, Wanli21/4/15 (5/15/1593),

- 46 *Sŏnjo sillok*, fasc. 39, Sŏnjo26/6/21 (7/19/1593), 22:15.
- 47 Piao, *Mindai Chū-Chō henkyō no kenkyū*, 237.
- 48 *Sŏnjo sillok*, fasc. 91, Sŏnjo 30/8/8 (9/18/1597), 23:275; Piao, *Mindai Chū-Chō henkyō no kenkyū*, 238.
- 49 Yu Sŏngnyong, *Sŏae chip*, fasc. 16, in vol. 52 of *Han'guk munjip ch'onggan* (Seoul: Kyŏngin munhwasa, 1996), 322.
- 50 Yu Sŏngnyong, *Chingbirok*, fasc. 3, in Kang Taegŏl and Sŏ Inhan, eds., *Imjin waeran saryo ch'ongsŏ: Yŏksa* (Chinju: Kungnip Chinju pangmulwan, 2001), 1:221. In 1596 the Wanli emperor began dispatching court eunuchs to provinces to open mines and collect the so-called “mine tax” (*kuangshui*). However, widespread abuse by “mine tax commissioners” led to several known cases of riot in cities such as Linqing and Suzhou. While further research is awaited, Chinese merchants’ preferences at the Chunggang market may have reflected such a political development in China. As the news of Wanli’s mine tax policy reached the Chosŏn court, Chosŏn officials were concerned that a Ming tax commissioner would be dispatched to Korea to collect mine taxes. Earlier, the Ming had also urged the Chosŏn to open silver mines as a revenue source to fund the Ming campaign in Korea. See Harry Miller, *State Versus Gentry in Late Ming Dynasty China, 1572-1644* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 75-94; Han, *Imjin waeran kwa Han-Chung kwan'gye*, 105-11; *Sŏnjo sillok*, fasc. 112, Sŏnjo32/4/13 (5/7/1599), 23:611. For riots in connection with the mine tax, see Tanigawa Michio and Mori Masao, eds., *Chūgoku minshū hanranshi* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1978-83), 4:9-11.
- 51 *Sadae mun'gwe* (Exemplars of serving the great), fasc. 36, Wanli28/5/5 (6/15/1600) (Keijō: Chōsen Sōtokufu, 1935), 1a-3a.
- 52 *Sŏnjo sillok*, fasc. 147, Sŏnjo35/2/2 (2/23/1602), 24:349.
- 53 The text here reads *pinryō* (Ch. *pinlǔ*, female donkey), but the character *pin* (female) is likely an error for *mo* (Ch. *mu*, male).
- 54 *Sŏnjo sillok*, fasc. 50, Sŏnjo27/4/22 (6/10/1594), 22:257.
- 55 For the controversy surrounding Yang Hao’s removal from office, see Swope, “War and Remembrance: Yang Hao and the Siege of Ulsan of 1598,” *Journal of Asian History* 42. 2 (2008), 165-95; Suzuki Kai, “Tei Ōtai no hen to Chōsen: Teiyūwaranki ni okeru Chō-Min kankei no ichi kyokuyumen,” *Chōsen gakuho* 219 (2011), 39-71.
- 56 The text reads Liaodong Buzhengsi (Kr. Yodong P’ojŏngsa), but the term here likely refers to the General Administration Circuit. During the Ming period, Liaodong was administered by the Regional Military Commission of Liaodong and branch offices of the Provincial Administration Office and Provincial Surveillance Office of Shandong. For analysis of their overlapping jurisdictions, see Hasumi Moriyoshi, *Mindai Ryōtō to Chōsen* (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 2014), 17-44.
- 57 *Sŏnjo sillok*, fasc. 111, Sŏnjo 32/4/20 (5/14/1599), 23:601.
- 58 *Sŏnjo sillok*, fasc. 111, Sŏnjo 32/4/20 (5/14/1599), 23:601. According to Sin Hŭm’s account, Vice Commissioner Han Chuming was a native of Yi county, Shandong Province. He took charge of provisions during the final stages of the war, staying in Korea from the eighth month of 1598 to the tenth month of 1600. See Sin Hŭm, *Sangch'on ko*, fasc. 39, in *Han'guk munjip ch'onggan*, 72:284.
- 59 *Sŏnjo sillok*, fasc. 117, Sŏnjo 32/9/10 (10/28/1599), 23:677.

- 60 Yazawa Toshihiko, “Matteo Ricci to Bunroku-Keichō no eki,” *Nippon rekishi* 70 (1954), 18.
- 61 For example, see a proposal by the Chosŏn Board of Revenue in *Sŏnjo sillok*, fasc. 130, Sŏnjo 33/10/18 (11/23/1600), 24:138.
- 62 *Sŏnjo sillok*, fasc. 124, Sŏnjo33/4/23 (6/4/1600), 24:62.
- 63 *Sadae mun’gwe*, fasc. 36, Wanli28/5/5 (6/15/1600), 1a–3a. An abridged version of the communication is in *Sŏnjo sillok*, fasc. 125, Sŏnjo33/5/5 (6/15/1600), 24:67. For discussion of Ming sentries or spies (*yebushou*), see Kawagoe Yasuhiro, “Mindai hokuhen no ‘yafushū’ ni tsuite,” *Chūō daigaku bungakubu kiyō: Shigakka* 46 (2001), 57–83; idem., “Futatabi Mindai hokuhen no ‘yafushū’ nit suite,” *Chūō daigaku jinbunken kiyō* 58 (2006), 1–25.
- 64 *Sŏnjo sillok*, fasc. 142, Sŏnjo34/10/26 (12/1/1600), 24:308; fasc. 145, Sŏnjo35/1/9 (2/11/1601), 24:332.
- 65 *Sŏnjo sillok*, fasc. 131, Sŏnjo33/11/16 (12/21/1600), 24:150.
- 66 *Sŏnjo sillok*, fasc. 124, Sŏnjo33/4/23 (6/4/1600), 24:62.
- 67 *Sŏnjo sillok*, fasc. 124, Sŏnjo33/4/23 (6/4/1600), 24:62.
- 68 *Sŏnjo sillok*, fasc. 131, Sŏnjo33/11/16 (12/21/1600), 24:150. The phrase “giving life to the dead and fresh to the bones” appears in the *Zuo Commentary on the Spring and Autumn Annals*, 22nd year of Duke Xiang. James Legge, *Chinese Classics*, vol. 5, pt. 2, 496.
- 69 *Sadae mun’gwe*, fasc. 47, Wanli34/10/30 (11/29/1606), 69–71; Piao Yan, *Mindai Chū-Chō henkyō no kenkyū*. (Ph.D. diss., Kyoto University, 2010), 239.
- 70 Piao, *Mindai Chū-Chō henkyō no kenkyū*, 254.
- 71 Ō Sukkwŏn, *Kosa ch’waryo*, rev. Pak Hūihyŏn et al. (Keijō: Keijō teikoku daigaku hōbungakubu, 1941), 107; Sō Yōngbo and Sim Sanggyu, comp., *Man’gi yoram: Chaeyong p’yon* (Seoul: Kyōngin munhwasa, 1972), 723.
- 72 *Sŏnjo sillok*, fasc. 146, Sŏnjo35/2/21 (3/14/1602), 24:348.
- 73 *Sŏnjo sillok*, fasc. 156, Sŏnjo35/11/7 (12/19/1602), 24:423; fasc. 159, Sŏnjo36/2/1 (3/13/1603), 24:445; fasc. 160, Sŏnjo36/3/16 (4/26/1602), 24:458.
- 74 *Kwanghaegun ilgi, T’aebaeksansago bon* (Daily records of King Kwanghae, draft deposited at the Taebaeksan archives), Kwanghae9/4/7, in *Chosŏn wangjo sillok*, 32:581. Also see Tsuji Yamato, “17 seiki shotō Chōsen no tai-Min bōeki: Shoki Chūkō kaishi no sonpai wo chūshin ni,” *Tōyō gakuhō* 96.1 (2014), 8; Yi Hyōnsuk, “16–17 segi Chosŏn ūi tae-Chungguk such’ul chōngch’aek e kwanhan yŏn’gu,” *Hongik sabak* 6 (1996), 38. *Man’gi yoram*, however, records that the Chunggang market was terminated in 1609. *Man’gi yoram: Chaeyong p’yon*, 723.
- 75 *Sŏnjo sillok*, fasc. 133, Sŏnjo 34/1/6 (2/8/1601), 24:176.
- 76 *Sŏnjo sillok*, fasc. 133, Sŏnjo 34/1/6 (2/8/1601), 24:176.
- 77 For the seasonality of sea transport during the Imjin War, see Hasegawa, “War, Supply Lines, and Society in the Sino-Korean,” 109–52.
- 78 Dyer, *Grammatical Analysis of the Lao Ch’i-Ta*, 495.
- 79 While very few sources record the lives of Chinese merchants after the Imjin War, there are documented cases of Ming soldiers and their descendants settling in Korea after the war. See Sun Weiguo, *Da Ming qihao yu xiaozhonghua yishi: Chaoxian wangchao zun Zhou si Ming wenti yanjiu, 1637–1800* (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2007), 187–97. Also see Adam Bohnet, “Ruling Ideology and Marginal Subjects: Ming Loyalism and Foreign Lineages in Late Chosŏn Korea,” *Journal of Early Modern Korea* 15 (2011), 477–505; idem., “From

Liaodongese Refugee to Ming Loyalist: The Historiography of the Sanggok Ma, a Ming Migrant Descent Group in Late Joseon Korea,” *Review of Korean Studies* 15.1 (2012), 109–39.

SELECTED CHINESE CHARACTER GLOSSARY



Ah-Bao 阿寶

Ai Nengqi 艾能奇

Altan 俺答

anchasi 按察司

Anlong 安龍

Anqing shi shao chuan 安慶式哨船

Anyuan 安遠

Ba Da wang 八大王

Ba yi ji 八義記

Bai Wenxuan 白文選

Baitu ji 白兔記

bangli 榜例

Banhai Zhang 半海張氏

Bao Hansuo 包涵所

baochuan chang 寶船廠

baojia 保甲

Baojing 保靖

Baoming temple 保明

Baoning 保寧

Baoqing 寶慶

baoxiang 包鑲

Bayi ji 八義記

Beijing cheng gongdian zhi tu 北京城宮殿之圖

Bi Shilang 畢侍郎

bianmin 邊民

bingbu chi 兵部尺

Bixia Yuanjun 碧霞元君

Bo 燹

buyi 布衣

buzhengsi 布政司

canli junwu 參理軍物

Cao Run 曹潤

Ch'ae Su 蔡壽

changfu 常服

Changling 長陵

changming deng 長明燈

Changsha 長沙

Chang Kūn 章謹

Chashu 茶疏

Chen Hongshou 陳洪綬

Chen Suzhi 陳素芝

Chengdu 成都

Chenghua 成化

cheng yi 誠意

Chengzhai yuefu 誠齋樂府

Chijǒnggwan 質正官

Chin Ho 陳浩

Chingbirok 懲毖錄

Cho Hǒn 趙憲

Ch'oe An 崔安

Ch'oe Pu 崔溥

Chǒlla Province 全羅道

Chǒng Tong 鄭同

Chongqing 重慶

Chongzhen 崇禎

Chosǒn 朝鮮

Chosǒn wangcho sillok 朝鮮王朝實錄

Choufen zuo chuan 抽分座船

Chouhai tubian 籌海圖編

chuan shan mu 川杉木

chuan shan mubing lianer fang lianer fang gong danban 川杉木並連貳連參枋共單板

chuan shu 船書

Chuan xi lu 傳習錄

chuanqi 傳奇

Chunggang 中江

Chungjong 中宗

Ch'ungch'ōng Province 忠清道

Chuxiong 楚雄

Chuzhou 滁州

Da 達

Da guan 達官

Da Jinsha River 大金沙江 (Irrawaddy)

Da jun 達軍

Da Ming huidian 大明會典

Da Ming ling 大明令

Da Ming lǜ 大明律

Da Ming yitong zhi 大明一統志

Da Xi guo 大西國

Dadu 大都

Dahuang chuan 大黃船

Dali 大理

Dang-ha 當哈

danmin 蜚民

Datong 大同

di 狄

di 翟

Diankou jilue 滇寇紀略

Ding Yunpeng 丁雲鵬,

Dingling 定陵

Dongjing 東井

doukou 斗口

Du Renjie 杜仁傑

duanjin 端謹

duo min zu guo jia 多民族國家

duzhihui shisi 都指揮使司

Empress Ki 奇皇后

Er bai liao yi ke yin xun chuan 貳百料壹顆印巡船

Er bai liao xun sha chuan 貳百料巡沙船

Er bai liao zhan zuo chuan 貳百料戰座船

fan 番

fan jiao 番教

Fan Lian 范濂

fan ren 番人

fei 妃

Fei Mi 費密

feng 鳳

Feng Bao 馮寶

Feng Shu 馮淑

Feng Shuangli 馮雙禮

Feng Su 馮甦

Fengluan 奉鑾

Fengyue jinnang 風月錦囊

Fengtian dian 奉天殿

Fenshou dao 分守道

fo 佛

Folangji 佛朗機

fugu 復古

Fuqiao chuan 浮橋船

Fushe 復社

fu wo Han ren gu guo 復我漢人故國

gaihu 丐戶

Gao Huai 高淮

Gao Ming 高明

Ge Duan 葛端

Gegu 割股

Gongcheng zuofa 工程做法

Gongfei 恭妃

gu 谷

Gu Li 顧李

Gu Qiyuan 顧起元

Guafu zhengxi 寡婦征西

Guang yutu 廣輿圖

Guang zhi yi 廣志繹

Guangning 廣寧

Guanyin 觀音

Guilin 桂林

Guiyang 貴陽

Guizhou 貴州

guoben 國本

guqin 古琴

Hai chuan 海船

Haidongqing 海東青

haijin 海禁

haikou 海寇

Haining 海寧

Haiyan 海鹽

Han-Da 漢達

Han di 漢地

Han fa 漢法

Han fu 漢服

Han guan 漢官

Han jun 漢軍

Han Qiuzhong 韓求仲

Han Ŭng'in 韓應寅

Han ren 漢人

Han tu 漢土

Han wen 漢文

Han xing 漢姓

Han yu 漢語

Hansǒng 漢城

hao shou zhi zhong cheng hao shou 好手之中逞好手

He Hanbo 賀函伯

He Liangjun 何良俊

He Longxiang

He Qin 賀欽

Herong ji 和戎記

Hetao 河套

Hezhou 河州

Hong Chengchou 洪承疇

Hongwu 洪武

Hou hu er hao lou chuan 後湖二號樓船

Hou hu ping chuan 後湖平船

Hou hu yi hao lou chuan 後湖一號樓船

Hou Ying 侯英

Houwang bolai 厚往薄來

hu 胡

Hua 華

Hua ren 華人

hua wai 化外

Hua-Xia 華夏

Huadang Ge congtan 花當閣叢書

huafang 畫舫

Huagai dian 華蓋殿

Huang guifei 皇貴妃

Huang Liuheng 黃六鴻

Huang Ming zuxun 皇明祖訓

Huang shu 荒書

Huanghe tushuo 黃河圖說

Huangji dian 皇極殿

Huangmu 皇木

huangtan 黃檀

Huayan jing 華嚴經

Huayi tu 華夷圖

Huitong guan 會同館

hutie 戶帖

Huxuan Dance 胡旋舞

Hwanghae Province 黃海道

jiading 家丁

Jiajing 嘉靖

jian tidu junwu 劍提督軍物

jiamiao 家廟

Jiang Zao 江藻

jiang zuo 匠作

Jiangxiao lou 絳霄樓

Jiangxue 講學

Jianwen 建文

jiao jie 交結

Jiaohong ji 嬌紅記

Jimao banhai 勲茂半海

Jimen tangquan tu 薊門湯泉圖

Jinglüe fuguo yaobian 經略復國要編

Jingren gong 景仁宮

Jinling suoji 金陵瑣記

Jinshen dian 謹身殿

Jinshui he yu chuan 金水河魚船

Jiubian tu 九邊圖

Jiujiang shi shao chuan 九江式哨船

Jizong Xingche 繼總行徹

Jobtei 卓布泰

junmin 軍民

Kaiyuan 開原

kaizhong 開中

Kammokkwan 監牧官

Kang Ok 姜玉

Kezuo zhiyu 客座贅語

Kim Kwan 金瓘

Kim Po 金輔

Kim Ŭi 金義

Kong Shangren 孔尚任

kou 寇

Koryō 高麗

Koryōsa 高麗史

Kosa ch'waryo 攷事撮要

Ku Nam 具男

Kuai chuan 快船

Kūmgangsan 金剛山

Kūmnam chip 錦南集

Kunning gong 坤寧宮

Kunyu wanguo quantu 坤與萬國全圖

Kwōn 權

Kyōnggi Province 京畿道

Kyōngguk taejōn 經國大典

Kyōngsang Province 慶尚道

Lanzhou 蘭州

Laoqida (Kr. *Nogŏltae*) 老乞大

Ledu 樂都

Leng yan jing 楞嚴經

li 例

li 禮

li cheng 立誠

Li Dingguo 李定國

Li Jiru 李繼儒

Li Kaifu 李開府

Li Qing 李清

Li Taihe 李太和

Li Taihou (Empress dowager) 李太后

Li Yuankuan 黎元寬

li zhi 立志

Li Zhaoxiang 李昭祥

Li Zicheng 李自成

Liang tou chuan 兩頭船

Liangguang 兩廣

liangping jiaoyi 兩平交易

Liangzhi 良之

liao 料

Liaodong 遼東

lifu 禮服

lijia 里甲

Lin Yuanxu 林元敘

Liu Ba 劉八

Liu Jin 劉瑾

liu kou 流寇

Liu Ruoyu 劉若愚

Liu Rushi 柳如是

Liu Wenxiu 劉文秀

liu zei 流賊

Liu Zongzhou 劉宗周

Liumeng tu 流氓圖

Long Zaitian 龍在田

Longguo dian 隆國殿

Longjiang chuanchang zhi 龍江船廠志

lu 虜

Lu Cheng 陸澄

Lu Rong 陸容

Lu Shen 陸深

Lü 呂

luan 鸛

Luguo zhi tu 魯國志圖

luo 羅

Luo Hongxian 羅洪先

Luo Maodeng 羅懋登

Luo San 羅三

Luoluo 羅羅

luyin (Kr. noin) 路引

Ma Shiying 馬士英

man 蠻

Man'gi yoram 萬機要覽

mao 冒

Mao Yuanyi 茅元儀

Menggen 孟艮

Menglian 孟連

Miandian (Burma) 緬甸

mianguan 冕冠

Miaofa lianhua jing 妙法蓮華經

Miaoshan 妙善

min 民

Min Chungnam 閔中男

min ding 民丁

Min Fanli 閩藩理

min zu 民族

min zu ge ju 民族格局

Mingfei chusai 明妃出塞

Ming ru xue an 明儒學案

Ming shi 明史

Ming shilu 明實錄

mingqi 冥器

Mount Dayu 大峪山

Mount Mopan 磨盤山

Mu Tianbo 沐天波

Mubang 木邦

Nan jiugong pu 南九宮譜

Nan ren 南人

Nanchuan ji 南船記

Nandu fanhui tu 南都繁會圖

Nangan 南贛

nanmu 楠木

nanmu danban 楠木單板

nanxi 南戲

Nanzu (Nan zu) 南族

Ni Qian 倪謙

Nikan 尼堪

Ningbo 寧波

nongmin qiyi 農民起義

Ŏ Sukkwŏn 魚叔權

Ordos 鄂爾多斯

Ouyang Zhi 歐陽直

Panhu 盤瓠

Pan River 盤江 [AKA Beipan River]

Pei Min 裴旻

peng 蓬

Peng Tianxi 彭天錫

piao hai 漂海

Pibyŏnsa 備邊司

Pingjiang 平江

Pipa ji 琵琶記

Pullanggi 佛朗機

P'yŏngan Province 平安道

Qi Zhixiang 祁止祥

Qian Qianyi 錢謙益

Qianqing gong 乾清宮

Qin Jing 秦京

Qin Silin 秦四麟

Qing 清

Qing qian li bian chuan 輕淺利便船

qingtan 青檀

qinwang 親王

Qu Shen 屈伸

Qutan si 瞿曇寺

renwu 壬午

Rongchang (princess) 榮昌

Rouyuan nenger 柔遠能邇

Ruan Dacheng 阮大鍼

Sadae mun'gwe 事大文軌

Sanban chuan 參板船

Sanbao taijian xiyang ji 三寶太監西洋記

Sangch'on ko 象村稿

sanqu 散曲

sansi 三司

Sanyuan biji 三垣筆記

Sejo 世祖

Sejo sillok 世祖實錄

Semu 色目

sha 紗

Sha Dingzhou 沙定洲

Shaanxi Zhenzhanshou tulue 陝西鎮戰守圖略

shan 杉

Shanhu ji 珊瑚記

shao shi 稍食

Shen Defu 沈德符

Shen Li 沈立

Shen Qi 沈啟

Shen Zhou 沈周

shenduan 身段

Shi Xing 石星

shibosi 市舶司

shida (Kr. sadae) 事大

Shide tang 世德堂

Shizhou 施州

shizu 始祖

shizu 世族

shou 壽

Shuangyu 雙嶼

Shuihu zhuan 水滸傳

Si bai liao xun zuo chuan 肆百料巡座船

Si bai liao zhan zuo chuan 肆百料戰座船

Sin Hŭm 申欽

Sin Kwisaeng 申貴生

Sǒ Sǒng 徐洧

Sǒae chip 西厓集

Sǒng Hǔiyǒn 成希顔

song mu 松木

Song Yingchang 宋應昌

Sǒngjong 成宗

Sǒngjong sillok 成宗實錄

Sǒnjo sillok 宣祖實錄

Songzu (Song zu) 宋族

such'öl 水鐵

sui 歲

Sun Kewang 孫可望

Sun Qingzhe 孫清者

T'aejo 太祖

T'aejong 太宗

T'aejong sillok 太宗實錄

Taihe dian 太和殿

Taihe dian jishi 太和殿紀事

Taimiao 太廟

Taining 泰寧

tan mu 檀木

Tang guifei (consort) 唐貴妃

Tang Saier 唐賽兒

Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖

Tanyangzi 曇陽子

Tao'an mengyi 陶庵夢憶

taokou 套寇

Taoyan 陶偃

Tengyue 騰越

Tianwen tu 天文圖

Tianxia taiping 天下太平

T'ongmun'gwanji 通文館志

Tong Yangzheng 佟養正

tu 圖

Tu'an Gu 屠岸賈

Tumu 土木

Ŭiju 義州

wan 萬

Wang Cen 王岑

Wang Dao 王道

Wang Fuzhi 王夫之

Wang Heng 王衡

Wang Jiaxiu 王嘉秀

Wang Qi 王琦

Wang Shixing 王士性

Wang Shizhen 王士貞

Wang Weinan 王維男

Wang Xianchen 王獻臣

Wang Xijie 王喜姐

Wang Yangming 王陽明

Wang Zhaojun 王昭君

Wang Zhi 汪直

Wanli 萬曆

Wanli kuaijilu 萬曆會計錄

Wanli tongbao 萬曆通寶

Wei Qi 魏戚

Wen Tiren 溫體仁

Wen Yuren 溫育仁

Weng Wanda 翁萬達

Wenzhou 溫州

wo 倭

wokou 倭寇

Wu Bolin 吳伯麟

Wu Dalang 武大郎

Wu Daozi 吳道子

Wu Sangui 吳三桂

Wu Song Yixia ji 武松義俠記

Wubei zhi 武備志

Wugong chuan 蜈蚣船

Wujing qishu 武經七書

Wujun erke zhi 吳郡二科志

Wusheng laomu 無生老母

Wutaishan 五臺山

Xia Yan 夏言

Xia Yunchun 夏允淳

xiang zhong 相種

xiao jiang 小匠

xiao lunhua 小輪花

Xiaoduan 孝端

Xiaohuang chuan 小黃船

Xiaojing 孝靖

xiaozai yanshou 消災延壽

xiapei 霞帔

Xie Zhaozhi 謝肇淛

Xihua 西華

xin chi 新尺

xin ji li 心即理

Xiwangmu 西王母

Xixiang ji 西廂記

Xu Ai 徐愛

Xu Ciyu 許次紆

Xu Fuzuo 徐復祚

Xu Lun 許論

Xu Mengya 徐孟雅

Xu Wei徐渭

Xu Xincun lu 續幸存錄

Xu Yuan 徐元

Xuande 宣德

Xuanfu 宣府

xuangong 玄宮

Xuanwu 玄武

Xuanwu hu 玄武湖

Xuban 序班

Xue Kan 薛侃

xunfu 巡撫

xunshi 巡視

Xuzhou 敘州

yaji 雅集

Yalu (Kr. Amnok) River 鴨綠江

yan Hua yi zhi fang 嚴華夷之防

Yan Song 嚴嵩

Yan Xiuqing 閻秀卿

Yang Hao 楊鎬

Yang Si 楊四

Yang Sǒngchi 梁誠之

Yang Weizhi 陽畏知

Yang Yumin 楊與民

Yang Ziqi 楊子器

Yangliuqing 楊柳清

Yanzhu 嚴助

Yao 姚

Ye Sheng 葉盛

yebushou 夜不收

yeshi 野史

yi 夷

Yi bai liao zhan zuo chuan 壹百料戰座船

Yi bai wu shi liao zhan zuo chuan 壹百伍拾料戰座船

yi mao 衣帽

yi ren 夷人

Yi Ruolan 衣若蘭

Yi Sǒnggye 李成桂

Yi Yeon 李昞

Yiyang 弋陽

yingxiong 英雄

yingzao chi 營造尺

Yinzuoju 銀作局

Yǒ □

Yongle 永樂

Yongle dadian 永樂大典

Yongli 永曆

Yongli shilu 永曆實錄

Yongming Prince 永明王

Yongshun 永順

Yongxi yuefu 雍熙樂府

Yōnsan'gun 燕山君

Youju shilu 遊居柿錄

youshang 侑觴

Yu gugui 玉谷圭

yu mu 榆木

yu yin 語音

Yu Sǒngnyong 柳成龍

Yu Youfeng 余幼峰

Yuan qu xuan 元曲選

Yuan Zhongdao 袁中道

Yuanben 院本

Yuanhua 袁花

Yubei dahuang chuan 預備大黃船

Yudi tu 與地圖

Yuji tu 寓跡圖

Yun Pong 尹鳳

Yunjian jumu chao 雲間據目抄

Yunmeng (princess) 雲夢

Yunnan 雲南

Yunnanfu 雲南府 (Kunming)

Yunshao Daifu 雲韶大夫

Yupu zaji 寓圃雜記

zaji 雜記

zaju 雜劇

zan 簪

Zang Maoxun 臧懋循

Zang Xian 臧賢

Zaolin River 棗林河

zei 賊

Zeng Jing 曾鯨

Zeng Xian 曾銑

Zha Bingyi 查秉彝

Zha Huan 查煥

Zha Junbao 查均寶

Zha of Longshan 龍山查氏

Zha Yunyuan 查允元

Zha Zhihong 查志宏

Zha Zhilong 查志隆

Zhang Cai 張采

Zhang Dai 張岱

Zhang Dedi 張德地

Zhang Fengyi 張鳳翼

Zhang Han 張瀚

Zhang Jiuling 張九齡

Zhang Lu 張廬

zhang mu 樟木

Zhang Pu 張溥

Zhang Xianzhong 張獻忠

Zhang Yongzhong 張用忠

Zhao Chunqing 趙純卿

Zhao Dun 趙盾

Zhaoshi gu'er ji 趙氏孤兒記

Zhejiang Province 浙江省

Zheng Chenggong 鄭成功

Zheng guifei (consort) 鄭貴妃

Zheng He 鄭和

Zheng Ruozeng 鄭若曾

Zhengde 正德

Zhenjiang 鎮江

Zhenwu 真武

zhenyan 真言

zhi liangzhi 致良知

zhi xing heyi 知行合一

zhizhao 執照

zhong lei 種類

Zhong-Xia 中夏

Zhongguo 中國

Zhongguo li dai min zu shi 中國歷代民族史

Zhongguo ren 中國人

Zhongguo zhi min 中國之民

Zhongguo zhi ren 中國之人

Zhonghua 中華

Zhonghua min zu 中華民族

Zhonghua ren 中華人

Zhou Hongmo 周洪謨

Zhou Hui 周暉

Zhou Huichou 周惠疇

Zhou Jian 周堅

Zhu Changluo 朱常洛

Zhu Chenhou 朱宸豪

Zhu Chusheng 朱楚生

Zhu Di 朱棣

Zhu Guozhen 朱國禎

Zhu of Haichang 海昌祝氏

Zhu of Huayan 花園朱氏

Zhu Shaofang 朱少芳

Zhu Wan 朱紈

Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋

Zhu Yujiao 朱與交

zhu ti min zu 主體民族

zhuang mao 狀貌

zhujie 珠結

zhuozheng yuan 拙政園

zhusi 紵絲

zixiao (Kr. chaso) 字小

zongci 宗祠

zongdu 總督

zongzu 宗族

zuofang 作房

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